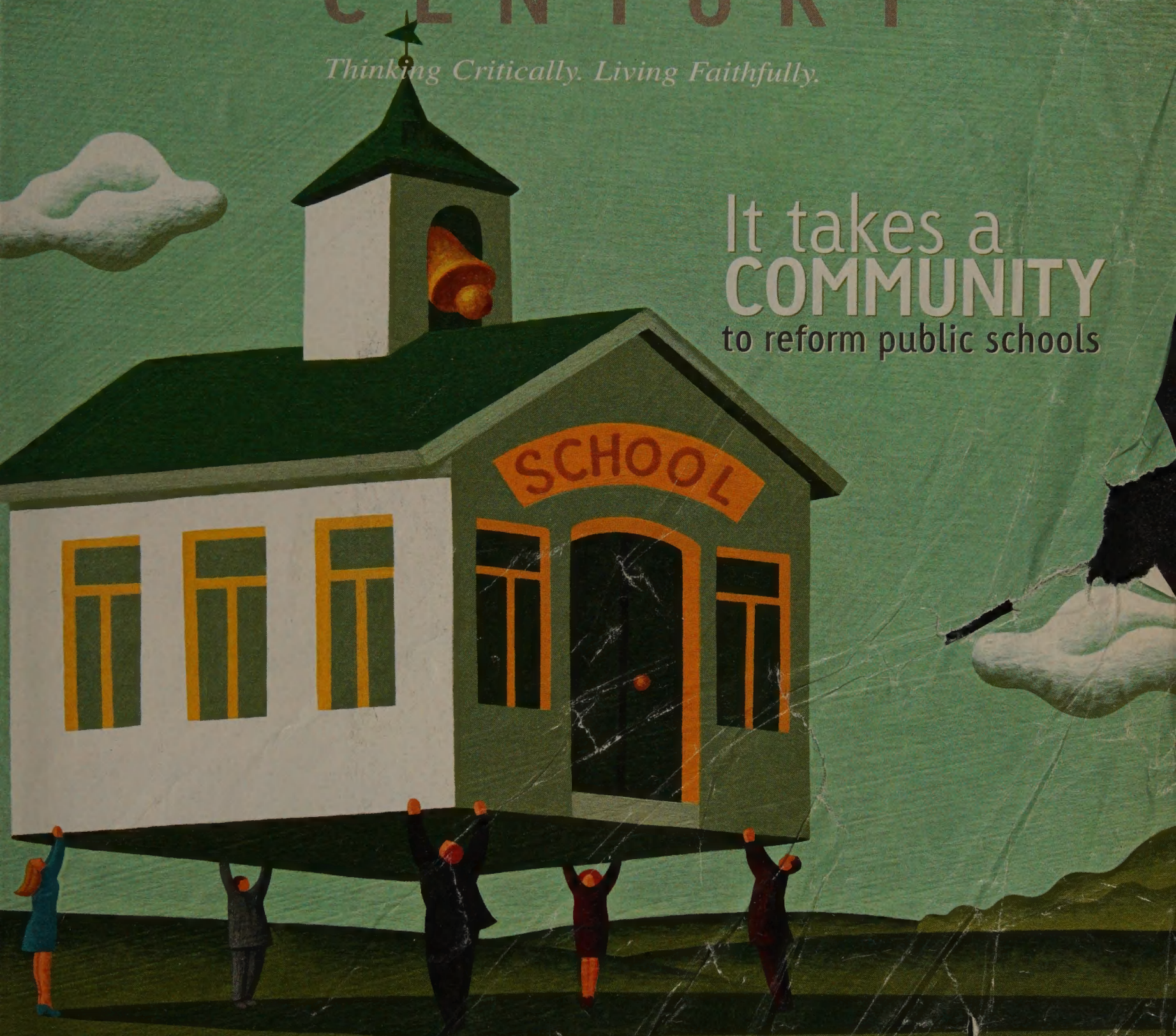


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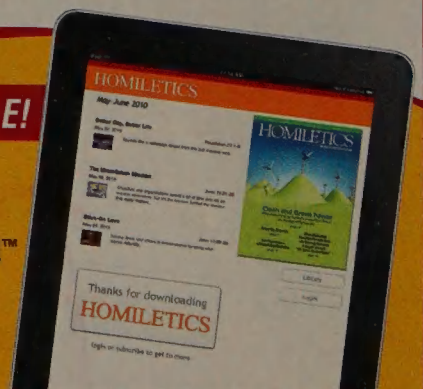
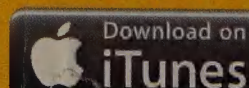
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Alternative ways

IN 1997 I TRAVELED to Croatia on behalf of my denomination to visit the Reformed churches and the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek. The shooting war had stopped, but bullet holes marked the facade of the hotel I stayed in. Racial and religious hatred was palpable. We talked with Roman Catholics who blamed the Serbian Orthodox for the violence and with Orthodox who blamed the Catholics and Bosnian Muslims. During my stay Presbyterian mission worker Steven Kurtz drove me across a bridge. As soon as we passed the Croatian checkpoint he removed his clerical collar and shoved it under the front seat. "What are you doing?" I asked. "That collar gets me through the Croatian checkpoint, no questions asked," he said, "but it could get me shot, or detained for a long time, on the other side."

In his book *Exclusion and Embrace*, Miroslav Volf writes out of his experience of life in Croatia. In the preface, he reports how theologian Jürgen Moltmann once asked him if he could embrace a Chetnik, one of the Serbian fighters who had been burning churches and raping and killing in Volf's native land. Volf answered: "No, I cannot—but as a follower of Christ I think I should be able to."

Volf is one of the few major theologians read by both mainliners and evangelicals. He taught at Fuller Seminary and is now at Yale Divinity School. In this issue (p. 10), he reflects on a verse in 1 Peter, which he says speaks to Christians' relations

with non-Christians. Volf insists that the text means what it says: honor everyone, even the one you do not agree with, even the one you believe is utterly wrong.

How we relate to the "other," ethnically, nationally, religiously, is the most important moral and theological issue of our time. It is so easy to identify all Israeli Jews with fanatical settlers, all Muslims with suicide bombers. It is easy for outsiders to identify all Christians with the radical fundamentalists who threaten to blow up abortion clinics.

Shirley Guthrie, in *Always Being Reformed*, writes that the results of Christian exclusivist thinking are always the same. "First, those who are sure their interpretation of the gospel is the correct one try to 'help' others understand and accept their true religion. . . . If that does not work, then in one form or another, violent or nonviolent, come the crusades, inquisitions, religious wars, and colonial or economic or cultural imperialism that try to *force* everyone to accept and live by this or that version of true Christianity."

Is there no alternative to the dreary dynamic of "my way is the only way, and the only way you and I will ever be reconciled and live in peace is for you to acknowledge the error of your ways and believe what I believe and become what I am"?

There is an alternative. We can view religious diversity as part of God's economy. We can hold together two ideas: that God's love is universal and unconditional, and that Jesus Christ is the full expression of that love.

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Roadside witness

MacKenzie Scott's article "Roadside crosses" (July 12), in focusing on these memorials as signs of individualism, prompted my own quite different thoughts. When I see these roadside crosses I imagine a family reaching out to those who pass by, seeking concern for their loss. I often say a prayer, joining with them in silent community. I also picture them trying to warn us drivers to be more careful—a gracious gesture of care for strangers.

I see a considerably more communal dimension than Scott sees. I find the choice of the cross by these families very significant and deeply rooted in the Christian tradition. Granted, there is no visible connection to an institution. But the cross seems to me a clear public and thus communal witness to their connection to the Christ of the church. I see these memorials as profoundly connective.

Jane Fisler Hoffman
Kansas City, Mo.

The article on roadside crosses does not show any understanding of their most effective purpose. It is not just to memorialize the dead victim. These crosses are warnings to motorists that this has been a dangerous area where someone was killed in an accident. We need such warnings.

I frequently drive by a cross and a basket of flowers at a curve in the road where a sweet little girl was killed. After her death, the city put up a sign warning about the curve—a sign that should have been put up much sooner.

Carolyn Haratnett
Texas City, Tex.

Gender moralism . . .

Edward Oakes's dutiful exposition of Joseph Ratzinger's theology notwithstanding ("Irreducible faith,"



© SCOTT SHARICK

July 12), the classical Christology of Ratzinger—now Pope Benedict XVI—effectively reduces the normative scope of the incarnation to the establishment of male privilege. While the pope may speak some of the right words in the face of secular relativism, what Europe and the rest of the world actually hear and see is the narrowing of historic Christianity to exclusivist obsessions with women and homosexuals. As William James once said, by their fruits, not their roots, you will know them.

Luther and the Reformers said that being church required only the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments. As a young Lutheran pastor in the 1960s, I joined those who called Lutheranism a confessing movement within the Church Catholic and looked for the day when we would reattach ourselves to the more encompassing Christian truth of which Rome was the custodian. That impulse is now inconceivable. As we see in the Anglican communion today, the driving motiva-

tion for rejoining Rome is a devotion to its gender moralism.

In the patristic period, the marks of the church were one, holy, catholic and apostolic, and the Reformation added gospel and sacramental celebration. The only marks that really count in defining the Catholic Church today, everywhere in the world, are the exclusion of homosexuals and the fear of the dangerous sexuality of women. Benedict's learned theology has done nothing to reassert the power of the gospel to a skeptical Europe and everything to convince those contemplating a new Pascalian wager not to bother.

Donald Heinz
Gig Harbor, Wash.

Grief counseling . . .

Thomas G. Long's critique of *On Death and Dying* is all to the good ("Grief without stages," June 28), but author Elisabeth Kübler-Ross gave to the rest of us what the Jewish community had already: steps to help us move through intense grief. She wrote at a time when death, grief and even feelings were not spoken about. (At age 11 my husband was not allowed to go to the funeral of his younger brother.) The close-knit communities of the past were gone for many people, and they had no natural support system in their time of grief.

The new "profession" of bereavement counselors gave people someone to speak with about their feelings and their loss and, most important, someone who was not personally touched by the loss and who had sensitivity and knowledge about the human psyche. So thank you, Kübler-Ross! And may we all remember that people are wonderful creations who never fit properly into anyone's systematic psychology or theology.

Sallie Smith
Freeport, Me.

August 9, 2011

A time to spend

In these tough times, Americans are tightening their belts—and their government needs to do the same.” Versions of this line have enjoyed bipartisan popularity lately. President Obama, House Speaker John Boehner and other leaders from both parties share the talking point. It’s a good applause line: it’s pithy, full of populist empathy, easy to understand. It’s also exactly wrong.

While partisan gridlock over raising the debt ceiling has taken the nation to the brink of disaster, the differences between Democrats and Republicans on the issue are largely political, not substantive. The consensus view is that the budget deficit is the country’s most pressing economic problem and that cuts to government spending are the primary solution. The policy questions on the table boil down to just this: how drastically should government spending be cut—and should the deficit also be reduced further by a modest package of tax increases?

Meanwhile, almost a tenth of Americans are unemployed. Cuts to essential services will hurt these people while they’re down, and deficit reduction of whatever kind will do little to get them working and the economy rolling again. That turnaround requires more of the things that antideficit zeal has pushed off the table: federal support for states, investments in bridges and roads and train tracks, targeted relief for lower-income taxpayers.

In short, to revive jobs and the economy, the federal government needs to do the *opposite* of what families should do in hard times: spend more money.

It’s true that doing this would increase the deficit, and it’s true that budget deficits ultimately need to be faced. But the deficit problem is far less urgent than most elected officials are letting on. In this weak economy with high unemployment, the deficit is a long-term problem, not a short-term one. The immediate issue is unemployment—a problem that calls for spending, not austerity. Along with improving people’s lives, more jobs mean a more robust economy—which will ultimately do more to reduce the deficit than anything else will.

President Obama has made some attempts to package short-term stimulus and long-term cuts together, but he’s been foiled by the Republicans’ sole focus on cutting government spending. Now the conservative narrative—that government should always be shrinking, even and especially in hard times—is ruling the day.

This is partly due to congressional Republicans’ skillful maneuvering. But it’s also because economics is a complex and counterintuitive subject: the best answers often don’t seem right to voters. “We’re all tightening our belts” is an unhelpful and misleading idea, but it sounds great in a speech. “The government has to step in to help reduce unemployment and revive the economy” has the advantage of being correct, but it’s a far less concrete and accessible point. That’s a pity for the jobless, whose crises and anxieties are anything but abstract.

The pressing issue is unemployment—a problem that calls for spending, not austerity.

CENTURY marks

UNSELF-CONSCIOUS: Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams recalled for the *Guardian* (July 8) how he once was an angst-ridden young man who worried about whether he was suffering enough or was compassionate enough. But then Mary Clare Millea, a Catholic nun, said to him, “You don’t have to suffer for the sins of the world, darling. It’s been done.” If we’re not preoccupied with justifying ourselves, said Williams, then we can focus on other things and can even afford to be wrong. “Jesus is the human event that reverses the flow of human self-absorption.”

SO WHAT? A young woman preaching her first sermon seemed to do everything right: her exegesis was sound; the text and title of the sermon matched well; the sermon was carefully organized and delivered in a clear, understandable manner. But the sermon

was wrongheaded, especially in context—an African-American congregation. The people called her sermon a lecture, because she failed to speak to their life situations and didn’t answer the “so what” question (Raquel A. St. Clair in *Interpretation*, July).

REPAIR WORK: Law students at Harvard, working for the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, are offering their services gratis to Bostonians whose houses are being foreclosed. Working with them are Project No One Leaves, a consortium of lawyers and activists, and Boston Community Capital (BCC), a community financial development organization. BCC buys up distressed properties and then sells them back to the original owners at a price just above current market value. Law professor David Grossman, who has a degree from Harvard Divinity School, heads up the Legal Aid Bureau.

He says that his efforts at fighting foreclosures stem from a key principle of Jewish ethics—*tikkun olam*, which refers to the obligation to “repair the world” (*Nation*, June 15).

BILLIONS UPON BILLIONS: Scott Russell Sanders asks you to imagine how you’d spend a billion dollars if you kept it under your mattress and didn’t earn any interest. If you lived 50 years, you could spend \$1.7 million per month or \$55,000 per day. If you invested that money instead in U.S. Treasury bonds, at current rates you could spend \$110,000 every day without touching the principal. That daily amount is a little more than twice the median annual household income in the U.S. So why do some billionaires want even more? It isn’t the money, says Sanders, it’s the power they gain through the money (*Orion*, July/August).

UPWARD MOBILITY in AMERICA in 2011



WAGES ARE SIN: In the 1970s Kenneth J. Douglas was CEO of Dean Foods, a leading U.S. dairy company. He earned what would be \$1 million a year in today’s economy and lived well but not ostentatiously. Numerous times he turned down pay raises because he thought they were bad for the morale of the company’s workers. Today his successor earns ten times as much in compensation and lives an opulent life. Meanwhile, workers’ wages at the company have been sliding. Some analysts observe that the social norms that discouraged big executive wages in the 1970s have changed. Now greed is considered good, and the people at the top believe they deserve what they make. When it comes to wage inequality, the U.S. ranks alongside developing countries—ahead of Uganda and Jamaica

but behind Cameroon and the Ivory Coast (*Washington Post*, June 18).

OFFLINE: A few years ago Yonatan Gur was playing an online game with a Swede. While playing they chatted with each other. When Gur mentioned that he was from Israel, the Swede asked: "How many Palestinians have you killed?" and then quickly disconnected. Gur never had a chance to tell the Swede that he was active in Combatants for Peace, a nonviolent organization of Israelis and Palestinians working against the occupation of the Palestinian territories. Nor could he say that while in the Israeli army he refused to serve in occupied areas. The Internet is a powerful tool for change, but, says Gur, it doesn't take the place of face-to-face encounters, especially between hostile groups (CGNews).

PEACE OF THE CITY: Iraq's first new church since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion opened in a poor Christian neighborhood of the northern city of Kirkuk last month. The inauguration of Mar Bulos (Saint Paul's) Church in the multiethnic and multi-religious city comes despite the sharp fall in the number of Christians in Iraq because of attacks and threats by al-Qaeda. The new church serves a community of about 200 Christian families who fled to Kirkuk and nearby regions from other parts of the country. In a symbolic gesture of solidarity with the Christian community, the Muslim imam of Kirkuk recited a prayer before the congregation of about 300, asking God for peace and security for Kirkuk and the rest of Iraq (AFP).

TEXT OR TALK? On average Americans spend 2.7 hours each day on their mobile phones. Nearly half that time is spent socializing. Women aged 35 to 54 are the most active socializers with mobile devices (*National Catholic Register*, July 10).

BACK TO THE FUTURE: New Saint Andrews College, a conservative Christian college founded in 1994, follows the curriculum at Harvard—the one used at Harvard in the 17th century. Located in Moscow, Idaho, the college is part of a growing movement of new Christian colleges that follow a Great Books program taught from a Christian

“Americans do not seem to mind about the widening inequality of income and wealth as much as you might expect them to in current circumstances. By and large, they have preferred opportunity to levelling; equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome. The trouble with this is that America is a long way from providing equal opportunity.”

— *The Economist* [July 9], answering the question why bashing the rich is an unpopular form of populism in the United States

“We obsess in this country about how to eat and dress and drink, about finding a job and a mate. About having sex and children. About how to live. But we don't talk about how to die. We act as if facing death weren't one of life's greatest, most absorbing thrills and challenges. Believe me, it is.”

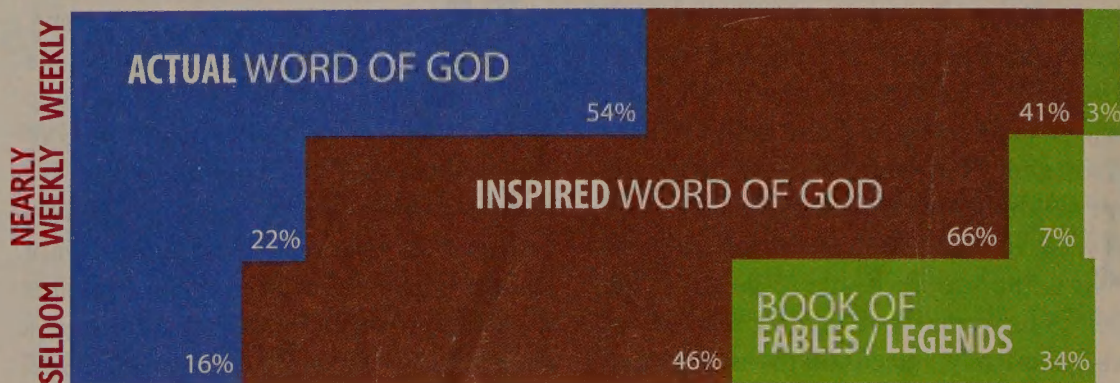
— Dudley Clendinen, who is dying from ALS disease (*New York Times*, July 10)

perspective. These colleges maintain their independence by not accepting federal funds or seeking regional accreditation. Some of them also do not have dormitories, placing their students in local homes instead. It is not unusual for them to have standards of conduct for their students that proscribe smoking, drinking and premarital sex, as well as requiring adherence to a faith statement that includes belief in a six-day view of creation (InsideHigherEd.com, July 12).

DEEP THOUGHT: Writer-historian David McCullough is often asked how much time he spends researching his books and how much time writing them. People don't ask him how much time he spends thinking about them. McCullough says he does his best thinking while taking early morning strolls. He began his early morning walks while researching his biography of Harry Truman, who had his own tradition of taking strolls (CSMonitor.com, June 24).

VIEWS OF THE BIBLE BY FREQUENCY OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE*

* Due to rounding, totals may not equal 100%.



SOURCE: Gallup May 5–8, 2011

All due respect

by Miroslav Volf

FOR THE forthcoming book *Abraham's Children: Liberty and Tolerance in an Age of Religious Conflict* (edited by Kelly Clark), I contributed an essay on respect. In my view the Christian faith urges equal and universal respect, and it was not hard to find support in Christian classical texts for that view, which is now generally accepted.

A surprisingly little known segment of a verse in 1 Peter, an epistle dealing more thoroughly than any other biblical text with Christian relations to non-Christians, contains an explicit command to respect all people. It says simply and straightforwardly: "Honor everyone" (2:17). I summarized the position in a post on my Facebook wall: "1 Peter says: 'Honor everyone.' 'Honor'—not merely 'don't demean' or 'tolerate,' but *honor*. And 'everyone'—not only 'those in our political camp' or 'with our moral persuasions,' but *everyone*."

"Everyone" includes even egregious wrongdoers. I posted the comment just after Jared Lee Loughner shot U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords at point-blank range, killed six people and wounded 14. The reaction of my Facebook friends was immediate. One of them wanted to know whether I really meant what I wrote. "Does this also mean honor the shooter?" "Yes, honor the shooter as well," I responded without flinching. "We should honor all folks whom God loves and for whom Christ died, and who, whatever else they are, are neighbors we are commanded to love as we love ourselves." The reach of God's love is the scope of our respect. As the first is universal, the second must be as well. Similarly, since God loves all equally, we should respect all equally.

But how does it make sense to respect

egregious wrongdoers without condoning wrongdoing? For centuries, Christian theologians have distinguished between persons and their deeds, or between person and work (as Martin Luther liked to put it). You should respect the person always; you should respect the work when it merits respect (and you should condemn and even despise the work when that is what the work merits). Immanuel Kant, one of the main progenitors of the modern notions of dignity and respect, gave the idea a secularized

(at least internally), they often identify strongly with their deep convictions. Failure to respect these convictions feels to them like a failure to respect them as persons. Many energetically religious people think that way.

Is it possible to respect not merely people whose convictions we reject but, in some cases, these very mistaken convictions themselves? In some cases, yes, but cases in which respect for mistaken convictions of others would be inappropriate are obvious. Had Loughner had an

We should respect people with whom we disagree. Should we also respect their convictions?

version: you should respect all equally because they are capable of rational choices; you should respect only those of their choices which merit respect. Put differently, I can simply *claim* respect for myself as a person, but I must *earn* respect for what I do.

With regard to egregious wrongdoing, we respect the wrongdoer but despise the wrongdoing. Does the same distinction between person and work hold true with regard to deep and defining convictions of others we consider untruthful? Do we simply say: we should respect all persons; we should respect only truthful convictions and not respect untruthful ones? I don't think it is that simple. When we disrespect people's deeply held convictions, they often feel disrespected themselves. While they distance themselves from their wrongdoings

elaborate philosophy justifying his shooting rampage, we would hardly want to respect it. Should we treat an overarching interpretation of life with which we fundamentally disagree—including major religions—in the same way?

We can be more generous without being any less truthful, and we should be. Some readers of the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* will know that my Christian convictions run deep and that at the same time I am a fan of Friedrich Nietzsche. Arguably, there are very few thinkers more anti-Christian than Nietzsche. He concluded his intellectual autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, with the challenge: "Have I been understood?—*Dionysus against the Crucified*." His phi-

Miroslav Volf, a *CENTURY* editor at large, teaches at Yale Divinity School and is the author of *Allah: A Christian Response* (HarperOne).

losophy is as far from the way of Jesus Christ as Dionysus, the god of libidinal revelry, is from the Crucified, the God of sacrificial love. And yet I respect not just Nietzsche as a person (with all his warts) but his philosophy as well. Moreover, I do so while completely disagreeing with him. Why do I respect his philosophy? His thinking is imaginative and stringent, his writing rhetorically powerful; some of his insights are deep, and his overall position is seductively compelling—so compelling that when I have doubts about

the Christian faith, I am tempted to become a Nietzschean!

Might we not be able to show a similar kind of respect to world religions other than our own? After all, Christians are not likely to disagree with any of them more than they disagree with Nietzsche, and these religions have oriented the lives of millions of people through the centuries. I see no reason why, for instance, a Christian might not fully and unqualifiedly affirm the doctrine of the Trinity as true but still respect the nontrinitarian

monotheism of Jews and Muslims. A Christian would then respect both them as persons and their most basic religious conviction. And just because we respect them and their views, we will argue with them about those views.

Notice the obvious: this is not a proposal for respect for world religions on the dubious ground that “all religions are at the bottom all the same.” It is a proposal for respect while insisting that 1) religions make truth claims and that 2) their truth claims are often incompatible. **CC**

At the Wild Goose Festival

Camp meeting

by Jesse James DeConto

A GROUP OF 20 white folk sat at the feet of African-American storyteller Melvin Bray as he explored “How Now Shall Wild Goosers Live?” It was the last day of the Wild Goose Festival, which brought together nearly 1,700 mainline Christians, emerging-church types and social justice activists for four

who were attending the festival. “All these men and women who’ve been exiled . . . these men and women who’ve been told they don’t have any place,” said Bray—“I imagine there were a few LGBTQ in the mix, because they didn’t have a voice in Israel, they weren’t part of the community. They find refuge with him, they find

Focusing on faith, justice, music and the arts, the festival displayed an inclusive spirituality.

days of art, music, worship, workshops and conversation at Shakori Hills in North Carolina’s Piedmont region.

Bray recited the story of how David attracted the outcasts of Israel to the wilderness, where he was hiding from Saul. Those outcasts, Bray said, were something like the group of “evangelical refugees,” gays and lesbians and activists

safety with him, they build this egalitarian community with him, with ideals about how we should live with one another.”

The wild goose is a Celtic symbol for the Holy Spirit. As some observers see it, the Wild Goose Festival is part of a movement of the Spirit in which doors are being blown off churches so that people mix across races, sexualities, social



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CROSSING CULTURES: Denver pastor and author Nadia Bolz-Weber speaks about planting churches that reach young adults.

classes, cultures and even religions—a movement that is arising not in spite of but because of the decline of mainline, predominantly white, churches.

“It’s good to be here with you, and I hope you start some kind of movement,” said Karin Bergquist as her band, Over the Rhine, prepared to play. Like all the performers and speakers at the festival,

Jesse James DeConto is a writer and musician in Durham, North Carolina.

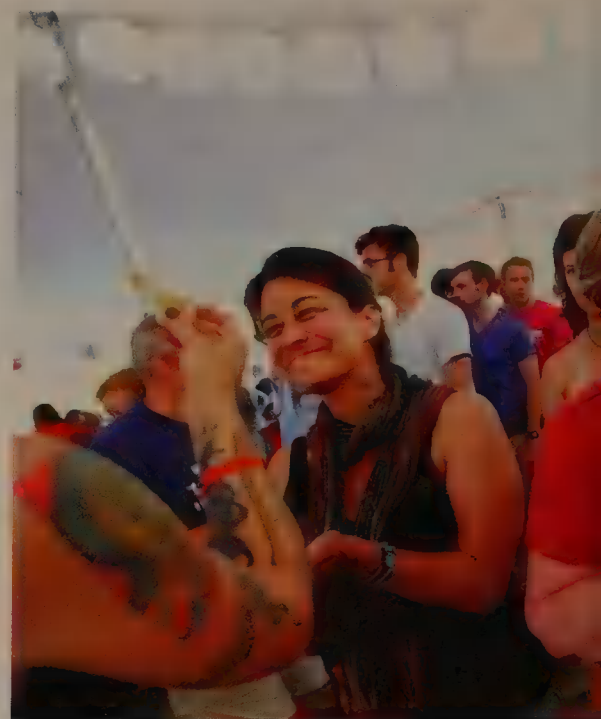
Over the Rhine played for free, wanting to be part of a Christian festival that is more about sharing money than spending it.

Punctuated by moments of intense reflection, Wild Goose was a weekend of fun and free spirits, as amateur musicians circled up to play, beer flowed from a local brewery, Frisbees soared and people lingered around campfires into the early morning hours. The festival was sponsored by more than a dozen organizations, including Thomas Nelson publishing company, Sojourners and World Vision, and the organizing team was led by Irish peace activist Gareth Higgins.

Diana Butler Bass, an Episcopalian author who studies decline and renewal in the mainline church, spoke of a “new spiritual awakening” afoot in which Amer-

ican Christians are being profoundly altered by contact not only with Christians from other parts of the globe but also with Hindus, Buddhists and nature spiritualists. Citing the late church historian William McLoughlin, Bass said this new religious syncretism might constitute the nation’s Fourth Great Awakening.

Paul Knitter, professor of world religions at Union Theological Seminary, suggested that pluralism is calling Christians to greater faithfulness. “Jesus was principally concerned with witnessing to the reign of God,” he said. “Jesus was not as Christocentric as a lot of Christians are. Jesus is the way that is open to other ways. Pluralism becomes part of the Good News. It’s Good News when you can learn from others. It’s bad news if God is only on your side. Inclusion is your dogma.”



FESTIVAL EUCHARIST: Attendees participate in a communion service using a bluegrass liturgy.

The pastor’s wife considers gray

*Am I a God near by, says the LORD,
and not a God far off?*
Jeremiah 23:23

Some days Yahweh’s crayon box
holds colors for tiptoeing within regret’s bold
lines, and others for scribbling acceptance’s
Wild Blue Yonder on bathroom walls,

jet trails through every grown-up’s sky. Silver
becomes the dime I find in Seven Eleven’s
parking lot, the memory of a minnow’s flash
or Aunt Mary’s lost ring—found.

And there’s *this* gray crayon’s violet wrap,
labeled Purple Mountains’ Majesty,
Crayola’s Rosetta Stone, a god gone corporate,
and international conspiracy to grab a child’s soul.

But what I’d like to believe is that Yahweh, most
mornings, strolls through his garden toward a hillside
door, tugs it open, waves on light, revealing
countless casks holding dyes, glimmers, petals,

screams, crushed insects, explosions, rust,
ointments, folded galaxies, sage, giggles,
lightning streaks, old lady dandelion hair,
locomotives, wine, grief (some casks leak),

blank peacock feathers, neon gas, angel raiment rags.
Then, Yahweh plays.

Nola Garrett

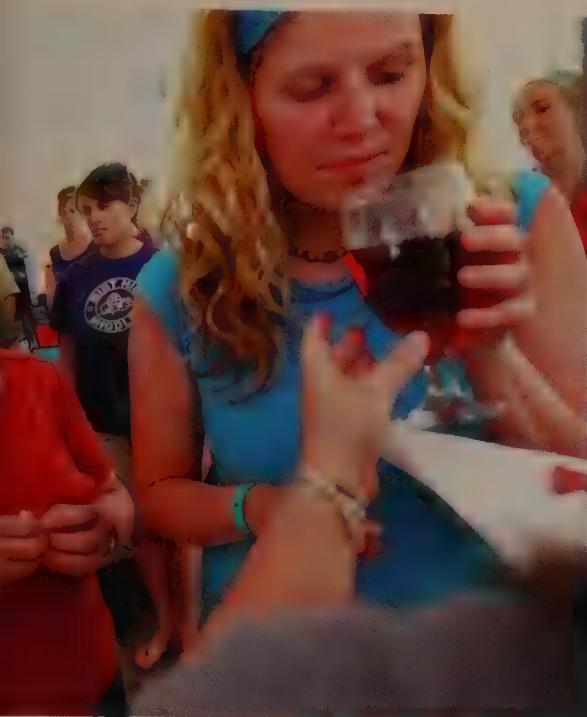
During a panel discussion on sexuality and justice, Episcopal priest Paul Fromberg said the LGBTQ battle for equality is a big part of this awakening. “God has been setting queer people free in the church to change everything,” he said. “None of us are free until everybody is free.”

The Wild Goose Festival also featured a Native American sweat lodge where people squeezed into a small tent for a hot, intense period of communal prayer.

“I believe that the kingdom of God will be here, and I look to Native Americans as a model for how it will be here,” said Karen Barletto of Norfolk, Virginia, during a session with Richard Twiss, a Sioux pastor and activist from South Dakota. “A lot of us are unlearning our Christian ways. The beauty of this festival is that we’re opening up to the idea that there isn’t just one authoritative way.”

As Soong-Chan Rah sees it, change on a grand scale is inevitable. One of the few evangelicals on the Wild Goose speaking roster, Rah teaches evangelism at North Park Theological Seminary, an Evangelical Covenant school in Chicago.

Rah spoke of the church’s escape from Western cultural captivity, citing statistics that show the fastest growing traditions, Baptist and Pentecostal, have large numbers of minorities, while numerically declining traditions—such as the Luther-



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ans, Congregationalists and Methodists—do not. Rah said the rising influence of black, Latino and Asian Christians is a good thing, because the American church currently “reflects more Western and white cultural values than it does the values of the scripture.”

But the festival was much more successful at attracting gays and lesbians and even people who don’t claim to be Christian than it was at attracting ethnic minorities. Bray picked up on that fact, joking about a sandwich board seen throughout the festival that had the letters GODISNOWHERE, forcing the reader to decide whether it says “God is nowhere” or “God is now here.” It might say, “God, is snow here?” Bray said, “because all I see is white people.”

Over at the Plant with Purpose booth, Colin Richard talked of working with farmers in developing countries, whose ways of using human labor instead of technology and of using natural building materials like mud and straw could help the U.S. deal with problems of unemployment, obesity and pollution.

Mainline churches have had success in building connections to social movements and in some cases to people of other faiths. A bridge that has been harder to build is one that connects to a generation born outside the church—young people interested in spirituality but allergic to organized religion. Nadia Bolz-Weber, founding pastor of House for All Sinners and Saints in Denver, described how young city dwellers have an indige-

nous culture that requires them to “culturally commute” in order to attend most mainline churches. They won’t be attracted by flashy worship bands or famous preachers or the prosperity gospel, she said. They want honest expression through art or conversation.

“If I suspect you are marketing to me, I will resent you,” she said. “We’re anti-excellence, pro-participation,” she said.

But Bolz-Weber bristles a bit when people call her authentic. “I hate that word *authenticity*,” she said. “Wow, the bar’s high in the church. If you’re not pretending to be someone else and not lying to people, you’re like this remarkable leader in the church.”

Bolz-Weber said her denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, has recognized that it doesn’t

know how to reach young adults and has been allowing seminarians to bypass typical internships and initial church assignments to plant their own churches while still in seminary. “My denomination saw who I was as a gift rather than a burden,” she said.

But Wild Goose attracted its fair share of cynics about the church. “I’m beginning to think that Christianity at an institutional level is a complete failure,” said Gayle Evers, a 55-year-old Texan raised in the Church of Christ, married in the Catholic Church, employed in a Methodist finance office and a former student at a Quaker seminary. “I am searching for Christians who believe we’re called to live sacrificially. . . . I am here because I have become disillusioned with the power and the hierarchy.”

Conversion experience

Suddenly we find ourselves in love
with fresh cilantro, both of us,

and now we put it into *everything*—
salsa, of course, but also into salads

and sides, and we find ourselves
eating it all by itself and putting

the fingers that have handled it,
steadied it while we chopped it, up

to our noses, breathing deep.
The crispness of its leaf’s become

an unexplained addiction, a mystery
so citrusy, of scent or secret spice—

and we are high on how it dawns
in us anew each time we think

to add it to the soup, and we’re
embarrassed by the way we feel

because we both remember clearly
another time, though not *exactly* when,

in which we’d had a very pointed conversation
and agreed we didn’t like it in the least.

Mary M. Brown

Freedom Riders, Israeli style

Vera Kreidlin boarded an empty No. 56 bus for the 25-minute ride from a religious neighborhood in the heart of the city to Ramat Shlomo, an ultra-Orthodox Jewish enclave in East Jerusalem. Dressed in a cotton shirt and jeans on a sweltering July day, Kreidlin opted for a seat near the front, three rows behind the driver.

It would have been enough to make Rosa Parks proud.

Along the way, the bus stopped to pick up fervently religious men in crisp black suits. The vast majority of the women who boarded the bus, all of them modestly dressed, entered through the bus's center door. And every single one headed for the rear.

For years, the No. 56 route has been known as a segregated line, one of nearly 60 public bus lines around the country where women have felt compelled to sit in the back of the bus while the men rode up front.

Although Kreidlin, a 25-year-old graduate student at Hebrew University, appeared relaxed, she was on high alert for passengers who might try to force her—verbally or physically—to join the other women at the back of the bus.

In the ultra-Orthodox world, it is religiously immodest for unrelated men and women to interact on a casual basis, even if they're all crammed onto a crowded bus. In recent years, public bus companies in Israel have tried to woo religious passengers by promoting gender separation.

Last January, Israel's High Court ruled that gender segregation must be entirely voluntary.

"I'm here to see whether the court's ruling banning religious coercion on public buses is being enforced," said Kreidlin, a secular Jew. "The court ruled that every bus must have a sign stating

that passengers may sit wherever they choose, and that intimidating someone is illegal."

The sign was nowhere to be found on the No. 56. Gazing at the women and girls in the rear, Kreidlin said she has taken many such rides in recent weeks "to show the passengers, and especially the religious women, that they're free to sit wherever they want. Sometimes, when they see other women already sitting in the front, they decide to sit up here too."

On July 7, the Jerusalem-based Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC), which had successfully petitioned the High Court to ban religious coercion on public transit, officially launched a program to encourage visiting Jewish tour groups to ride the once-segregated buses.

Anat Hoffman, who heads IRAC, said the Freedom Rider program, which was inspired by the civil rights activists who challenged racial segregation in the American South, is a way to share Israelis' struggle against religious coercion with Jews around the world.

Prior to the court ruling, Israelis and foreigners rode the segregated buses, and their reports were eventually tallied and submitted to the court, Hoffman said. Like the female passengers who initiated the court petition, some of the volunteers were subjected "to verbal abuse, pushing, name calling and shouting," Hoffman noted.

Since the court's decision, Hoffman said, the number of bus lines that are segregated has fallen from 56 to 16. "On



DESEGREGATING BUSES IN ISRAEL: American Amy Milin, who graduated from Florida Atlantic University last year, recently spent three months riding Israeli buses to ensure that women knew they could sit anywhere on a public bus.

RNS / MICHELE CHABIN



AN EQUALIZING RULING: *Ultra-Orthodox Jews wait for a bus in a religious neighborhood of Jerusalem. Last January Israel's High Court ruled that passengers on public buses cannot forcefully segregate riders by gender.*

some of these buses," she said, "women can't even go up to the front door to pay for their tickets." Still, she noted, reported incidents of violence or of the driver actively prohibiting women from the front of buses have "decreased considerably."

A bus company named Egged, which runs most of the once-segregated bus lines, declined to comment on the bus monitors. But Egged spokesman Ron Retner said the company has trained drivers and installed signs on every route to comply with the court ruling.

"Except for occasional incidents that interfere with public order, there has been no need for any further involvement," Retner said. The volunteer riders will be expected to sit near the front half of buses on the segregated routes, space permitting, and report any harassment by the driver or fellow passengers.

Amy Milin, a recent graduate of Florida Atlantic University who spent three months interning at IRAC, said the atmosphere on the buses has recently changed for the better.

Standing at a Jerusalem bus stop, Milin, who rode on 60 buses during her internship, said "there were times a group of people crowded around me and said I don't belong here and I'm ruining their religion." But it got better toward the end of her internship, she said.

Milin said the struggle is worthwhile "because there are many, many Orthodox women" who have called IRAC and other organizations "to say they want to be able to sit with their husbands or sons but are afraid to out of fear of being ostracized in their communities."

At another stop along route 56, an ultra-Orthodox high school student who would only give her name as Sarah said she'd head to the back of the bus "not because anyone is forcing me to, but because the Torah commands us to live modestly.

"This is my decision," she asserted, "no one else's."

As for Kreidlin, the Hebrew University grad student who sat up front, if women like Sarah truly want to sit in the back of the bus, that's fine with her. "I would never try to convince a woman to sit in the front. The goal is to inform people of their option to sit wherever they want," she said. "The issue is free choice." —Michelle Chabin, RNS

Church leaders challenge Alabama's immigration law

Faith leaders have joined a coalition of civil rights groups to file a federal lawsuit challenging Alabama's new immigration law described by Gov. Robert Bentley as the strongest in the country.

Greater Birmingham Ministries, a multiracial organization representing 20 different faith groups, including the Alabama Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, joined forces with the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Immigration Law Center and the Southern Poverty Law Center in challenging the bill signed into law June 9.

The bill, inspired by Arizona's controversial immigration law, will take effect September 1 and empowers law enforcement officials to check the immigration status of individuals. It also makes it a crime to knowingly transport an undocumented immigrant and requires school officials to determine the immigration status of students and their parents, among other provisions.

A class-action lawsuit spearheaded by the Southern Poverty Law Center argues that the law is unconstitutional on several counts. The plaintiffs said the law will lead to racial profiling and unlawful interrogations, searches, seizures and arrests that violate the Fourth Amendment.

Faith-based organizations raised First Amendment concerns about the new law.

"Today, our mission and the missions of many religious groups across Alabama have been made impossible by the recently enacted Alabama immigration law," said Scott Douglas, executive director of Greater Birmingham Ministries. "This law interferes with the free exercise of religion. It violates core values of various faiths because it criminalizes acts of love and hospitality—commandments from our God of many names."

One of the plaintiffs, Ellin Jimmerson, is a minister at Weatherly Heights Baptist Church in Huntsville. Her ministry has included making a documentary film about causes of unlawful immigration. She also preaches to and counsels undocumented immigrants and claims that the bill would infringe on vital parts of her ministry.

Several major religious denominations opposed the new law. Associated Press reported that its critics included United Methodist, Episcopal, Lutheran and Catholic leaders in the state. "It's huge to have the faith community come together and speak out in such great numbers against the new law," said Isabel Rubio, executive director of the Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama.

The state's largest religious body, the Alabama Baptist State Convention, has not taken a position on the bill. But Bob Terry, editor of *Alabama Baptist*, wrote an editorial saying that churches seeking to heed the call of a recent Southern Baptist Convention resolution to share the gospel "regardless of country of origin or immigration status" might soon find themselves outside of the law of the land.

"It should not be surprising that an Alabama Baptist missionary declared he is willing to go to jail, if necessary, in order to continue ministering to Hispanics," Terry wrote. —Bob Allen, ABP

Episcopalians defend bishop's decision in clergy sexual abuse case

The Episcopal Church is rejecting charges that its top leader, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, mishandled the ordination of a former priest who is now accused of sexual abuse.

Jefferts Schori has remained silent on the matter, which surfaced after an alleged victim filed suit in June against a Benedictine monastery in Missouri where the priest, Bede Parry, once lived.

Parry, a former Catholic monk, was ordained as an Episcopal priest in 2004 in Nevada, where Jefferts Schori was bishop before her 2006 election as presiding bishop of the national church body. Her successor in Nevada, Bishop Dan Edwards, said July 5 that a thorough review of church records shows that Jefferts Schori "handled the situation perfectly appropriately."

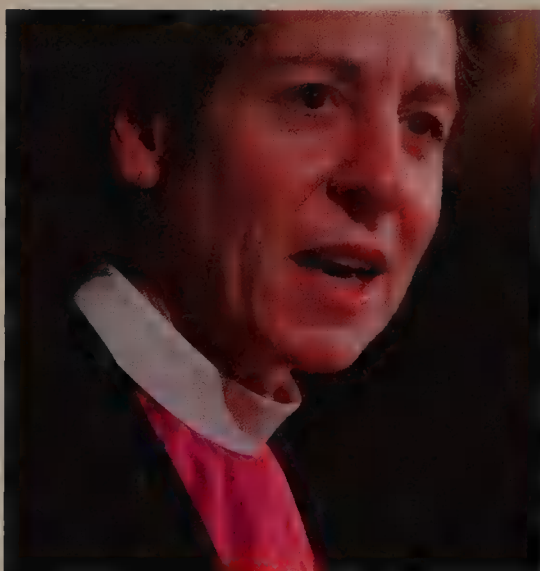
"The spin on this, that Bishop Katharine failed to follow the rules to protect children, is highly ironic," said Edwards, who noted that the Diocese of Nevada has wrestled with problems of clergy misconduct. "She has done more to clean up this diocese than anybody."

While the Roman Catholic Church has weathered years of allegations from victims and lawyers of mishandling abuse cases, the issue has not similarly roiled the 2.4-million-member Episcopal Church or Jefferts Schori's leadership.

Edwards said the process that accepted Parry as an Episcopal priest was careful and long, stretching from 2002 until 2004. Parry told church leaders, including Jefferts Schori, that in 1987 he had inappropriately touched an adolescent in Missouri and that the police had been called but charges had not been filed. He also disclosed that he had undergone counseling.

Episcopal leaders found that there had been no other incidents involving Parry and subjected him to their own routine psychological testing, Edwards said. They concluded that he did not fit the profile of a pedophile.

"Nonetheless, Bishop Katharine



Katharine Jefferts Schori

directed that Bede Parry would not be allowed to have contact with minors in the ministry," Edwards said in an interview. "She gave that directive to people who oversaw him in the ministry."

A statement issued by the Nevada diocese after the lawsuit was filed raised more questions than it answered, according to victims' advocates, and said nothing of Jefferts Schori's role in the matter.

"Parishioners deserve the whole truth about why [she] kept silent about Parry's crimes and why she ordained him," said David Clohessy, national director the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP).

"Many church officials, not just Catholic bishops, fixate on self-preservation rather than on preventing abuse and healing victims and exposing the truth," he said.

Requests for comment from Episcopal Church headquarters in New York were referred to the Nevada diocese, a tactic that Bishop Paul Marshall of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, called "obfuscation" and a failure of leadership. "On paper, we are a one-strike church, but in reality, too many people have walked," Marshall wrote on Episcopal Café, an independent liberal-leaning website.

The lawsuit does not name Parry, the Episcopal Church or the Diocese of Nevada but instead targets the Conception Abbey, a Roman Catholic monastery and seminary in northwestern Missouri where the alleged abuse occurred.

The civil suit also contends that the results of psychological testing in 2000 showed that Parry was a serial abuser who

was likely to offend again and that this information was shared with the Episcopal Church prior to his ordination. "I'm really skeptical that the report ever existed. But if it did, we've never seen it," said Edwards.

Parry resigned from the priesthood in June after the suit was filed, Edwards said. He had worked as an organist at All Saints' Church in Las Vegas, and his pastoral care mostly involved senior citizens. —Lauren Markoe, RNS

Church of England may divest from News Corp.

The Church of England said it may sell its \$6 million share in News Corporation unless the global media organization conducts a full and open inquiry into a phone hacking scandal.

The church's Ethical Investment Advisory Group (EIAG) said it told News Corporation officials that the phone hacking charges swirling around its weekly tabloid, *News of the World*, are "utterly reprehensible and unethical." News Corporation chairman Rupert Murdoch closed the newspaper on July 10.

"No reply has been received yet," church spokesman Lou Henderson said in an interview.

The issue had been raised privately during discussions about finance and business on July 12 during the church's General Synod in York, he said.

"While EIAG welcomes the decision to close the *News of the World*, this action is not a sufficient response to the revelations of malpractice at the paper," EIAG said in a statement that was sent to Murdoch's office.

The Church of England's investment in the \$32 billion News Corporation is small. But the gesture is seen in business and church circles as significant. The church's total investment portfolio is about \$8 billion.

"Church and laypeople that know about it [the investment] are of a mind that we should disinvest," said Jonathan Alderton-Ford, an Anglican vicar in southern England, "or we should be pressing through our ownership for change in the leadership of News Corporation." —Trevor Grundy, ENInews

Bachmann's former church explains antipapal view

The Lutheran denomination that GOP presidential candidate Rep. Michele Bachmann quit in June has sought to explain its belief that the papacy is the Antichrist after reports questioned whether Bachmann is anti-Catholic.

Six days before Bachmann officially launched her presidential campaign, the Minnesota Republican and her family made a verbal request to leave Salem Lutheran Church in Stillwater, Minnesota, which is affiliated with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS).

Synod spokesman Joel Hochmuth said July 14 that the Bachmanns had been members of Salem Lutheran for more than a decade but had not attended the church for at least two years. The family did not request a transfer to another congregation, he said.

The denomination says on its website: "We identify the Antichrist as the papacy. This is a historical judgment based on scripture." Bachmann's campaign did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The Republican, who has surged in recent presidential polls, denied that she is anti-Catholic in a 2006 debate. "It's abhorrent, it's religious bigotry. I love Catholics, I'm a Christian, and my church does not believe that the pope is the Antichrist, that's absolutely false."

Bachmann also said that her pastor, Marcus Birkholz, told her he was "appalled that someone would put that out." According to Hochmuth, the pastor told Bachmann that WELS "primarily views the office of the papacy as the Antichrist, not the individual popes themselves."

Asked for comment, Birkholz said on July 14, "I have been asked by my congregation not to give any more interviews."

On that same day, an online report in *Atlantic* magazine reported on WELS's antipapal doctrine and questioned whether Bachmann also subscribes to the view.

Bill Donohue, president of the watchdog Catholic League, said he does not believe Bachmann is anti-Catholic, but

"it is not inappropriate to ask some pointed questions of Rep. Bachmann and her religion's tenets."

The WELS's Hochmuth said in an interview the antipapal doctrine is "not one of our driving views, and certainly not something that we preach from the pulpit." Hochmuth said he doubts whether many members of the Wisconsin Synod are aware of the doctrine, which dates to Protestant Reformer Martin Luther.

"As a confessional Lutheran church, we hold to the teachings of Martin Luther who himself maintained that the papacy, and in turn the pope, has set himself up in place of Christ, and so is the Antichrist," Hochmuth said. He also described the Antichrist as a theological

principle, not a "cartoon character with horns."

Hochmuth added that "we love and respect Catholic Christians. Yet we pray that they would come to see the errors of their church's official doctrine that the pope is infallible and that no one can be saved outside of the Roman Catholic Church."

Lutherans believe that individual salvation comes through faith alone, not through obedience to church doctrine or leaders. With about 1,300 congregations and 400,000 members, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is one of the smallest and most conservative Lutheran denominations in the U.S. —Daniel Burke, RNS

Irish government releases 'damning' abuse report

A SPECIAL commission sponsored by the Irish government criticized a bishop for failing to report allegations of clerical sexual abuse to police and noted "concerns" about the same bishop's own interactions with a teenage boy.

The commission's report, published on July 13, is based on a two-and-half-year investigation of the Diocese of Cloyne in the wake of sexual abuse allegations made against 19 priests between 1996 and 2009.

Investigators faulted the diocese for failing to inform police about 15 allegations of clerical sexual abuse, including two cases in which the alleged victims were still minors at the time the accusations were made.

Speaking before the Irish parliament July 13, Prime Minister Enda Kenny described the report as "damning."

The Cloyne inquiry is the fourth major probe by the Irish government into clerical sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church since 2003. The investigations have revealed widespread child abuse over several decades by clergy and members of religious orders and have led to the resignations of three bishops.

None of the previous investigations dealt with events as recent as those in

the new report, which occurred after Irish church leaders established child protection policies in 1996. The report concludes that, in the case of Cloyne, those policies were "not fully or consistently implemented."

Bishop John Magee, who served as bishop of Cloyne during the entire period covered by the report, stepped down from active duty in March 2009 and resigned a year later. He publicly asked "forgiveness and pardon" for his failure to prevent sexual abuse.

During the investigation, the report said, "concerns were expressed about [Magee's] interaction with a 17-year-old boy" whom the bishop kissed and embraced, an experience that the teenager found "disquieting." But the report concluded that the incident was eventually handled correctly.

Prior to becoming bishop, Magee served as a private secretary to three popes: Paul VI, John Paul I and John Paul II.

The Vatican launched its own investigation of clerical sexual abuse in Ireland last November. It announced last month that the inquiry had finished its "first phase" but said that a published report of its findings might not appear until next year. —Francis X. Rocca, RNS

Ecumenical veteran sees a 'new frontier'

When Wesley Granberg-Michaelson was younger, the bad blood between Christian denominations made the notion of a modern-day ecumenical movement seem farfetched. Now the recently retired general secretary of the Reformed Church in America says American Christianity has reached "a new frontier."

"We have a chance of bringing in more around the table the way God really intends," said Granberg-Michaelson, who stepped down in June after 17 years in the post. "The missional church needs the unity of the church. How else do we think we can do useful things for the world if we're divided amongst ourselves?"

Amid a culture too often lost in its own self-importance, Christian unity is sorely needed, Granberg-Michaelson argues in his 288-page memoir, *Unexpected Destinations: An Evangelical Pilgrimage to World Christianity*.

Known in many Christian circles as the elder statesman of the contemporary ecumenical movement, Granberg-Michaelson urges Christians of all denominations to forge a new path of unity that requires them to do more than hold hands and sing "Kumbayah."

While loyal to his Reformed tradition, Granberg-Michaelson's book makes it clear he's grateful he wasn't tightly tethered to his denomination. In recent years, he helped guide the formation of Christian Churches Together, a broadly inclusive body with a global, ecumenical scope.

He recalls that the first time he profoundly experienced God's love was at a Trappist monastery, explains why the once Dutch-dominated RCA must morph into something more inclusive, and describes why the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches have lost their way.

Granberg-Michaelson's road to an inclusive Christianity started in a small way in 1950, while growing up in a suburb in northwest Chicago where he rode bicycles with two neighborhood friends who were Catholic.

Raised in an evangelical household where being "born again" was paramount, Granberg-Michaelson's mother encouraged her son to witness to his two Catholic friends about Jesus' saving grace. But evangelistic fervor turned into a mild case of envy when he noticed that his two friends had medals of St. Christopher—the patron saint of travelers—on their bikes' handlebars.

After many conversations with his boyhood friends, Granberg-Michaelson concluded that the doctrinal chasm between them wasn't as wide as he once thought. "The main difference was they had St. Christopher medals on their bikes, and I didn't," he said.

When it came to quieting his 60-hour workweeks, Granberg-Michaelson often found solace at a Trappist monastery. He still remembers his 1972 visit to the Holy Cross Abbey, a Trappist monastery in Berryville, Virginia, that enveloped him with God's presence.

"I had one of those deep and profound life-changing encounters where God's presence and love had simply overtaken me, and has stayed with me ever since," Granberg-Michaelson said. "To this day, when I want to go on a retreat, what I often do is head to a Catholic monastery."

Ethnic diversity also is vital to the body of Christ, added Granberg-Michaelson. During his tenure as the RCA's general secretary, 230 new churches were established since 1993—more than half of them involving people of color.

"The most important change is the

change in the culture of the RCA," Granberg-Michaelson said of his 177,500-member denomination. "Deep change isn't just changes in structure and programs but changes in values, habits and the style of the way we meet with one another, and bringing people into the RCA who don't know how to play Dutch bingo."

Granberg-Michaelson writes that he is most proud of navigating the denomination through some still-thorny issues. "Homosexuality comes to mind," he said. "I think we've been able to say this is an issue we're not going to let divide us, but figure out how to talk and keep our focus on the main things and not let us get off track."

Granberg-Michaelson also takes aim in his book at some long-held ecumenical partnerships: the NCC, he says, has suffered from "strategic incoherence" and "inept management."

"One problem with the modern ecumenical movement with the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches is it ended up—not by design—excluding huge parts of the Christian family," said Granberg-Michaelson, who served for six years on the WCC staff in Geneva.

"It's made up of historical Protestants and Orthodox but not Pentecostals or Roman Catholics. As good as the World Council of Churches is, one-quarter of all Christians are outside their membership. There are more Pentecostals today than those who are members of the World Council of Churches." —Paul R. Kopenkoskey, RNS

UCC affirms Common Agreement on baptism

AT ITS BIENNIAL General Synod in July in Tampa, Florida, the United Church of Christ became the latest historic Reformed church to formally approve the Common Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism. The agreement was approved previously by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference, the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church.

"These five churches have taken a significant step on the road to unity," said Michael Kinnamon, the top executive of the National Council of Churches in a July 14 statement. Both Kinnamon and Karen Georgia Thompson, the UCC minister of ecumenical and interfaith relations, said the next step among the partner churches will be talks about the goal of being "fully united around a common eucharistic table."

Churches seek new life under new names

For Living Faith Lutheran Church, the name change was as much about the future as the past. On the last Sunday of June, the Rockville, Maryland, congregation formally bid goodbye to its old name, Crusader Lutheran Church.

"We're not saying [Crusader] was a bad name," said Sandra Cox Shaw, the church's pastor. But now "our name will no longer be a stumbling block for people who want to visit us and get to know us."

Comments about the church's "militaristic" and "non-Christian" name reached a "critical mass" last year, said Michael Lidell, a former parish lay leader.

Concerned about the church's reputation, Lidell suggested a name change at an administrative meeting in May 2010.

But the process of changing the church's name—or "renaming," as church leaders call it—turned out to be complicated. Few local churches had changed their names. So leaders learned as they went along, hosting town hall-style meetings, learning how to file for a new charter and how to change the church's website.

After a yearlong process, the 140-member congregation, affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, celebrated its new name. "We affirm that we go on into the future a newly named entity but with the same mission," Shaw said on June 30.

While Living Faith's story might be uncommon, it is not unique. The seemingly mundane topic of a church name has become a flashpoint for U.S. congregations, with many renaming themselves in recent years for pragmatic, theological or cultural reasons.

Some Baptist churches have removed *Baptist* from their names. For example, what was once Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, attracts 1,000 worshipers each Sunday to the Fellowship at Two Rivers.

It's not just a megachurch phenomenon, and some Baptist churches remain Baptist even if the word is not in the name.



NEW NAME, SAME MISSION: *Guest preacher Philip Hirsch and Pastor Sandra Cox Shaw lead a church service to rename Crusader Lutheran Church in Rockville, Maryland, as Living Faith Lutheran Church after some questioned the church's "militaristic" name.*

Name changing "is an epidemic," said Bill Leonard, professor of Baptist studies at Wake Forest Divinity School in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, citing the success of nondenominational churches and the lack of Southern Baptist loyalty as driving the trend.

Leonard also noted that the Baptist brand has been tarnished by controversial congregations like the antigay (and independent) Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas.

"A number of churches on the left and the right are concerned that people are turned off by the Baptist name," Leonard said. "They believe that in the public square Baptists have looked shrill, unwelcoming, sectarian."

Church name changes can also mark a shift in the outlook or message of a congregation. When the First Reformed Church in Allendale, Alabama, voted to change its name to Lighthouse Community Church in 2004, large sections of the congregation resisted.

"It didn't go over well," said Steve Demers, who became the church's pastor shortly after the change. He added that the church lost about a third of its congregation over the renaming.

More recently, the Lighthouse congregation decided on yet another change—to break away from the Reformed Church in America, a move that Demers said was tied to the earlier

name change. "We wanted the name to say something. Many people won't attend [Reformed churches] based on preconceptions of what *Reformed* means," Demers said. "The whole stigma of denominations has proven divisive."

The renaming process at Living Faith Lutheran Church in Maryland also sparked differing opinions in the pews. "People felt very passionately on both sides of the issue," Shaw said. "Some felt tied to the name of the church in which their children were baptized and married, . . . [and some] understood 'crusade' as a crusade against poverty and oppression."

Still, the lure of a new name often wins out: Lidell said Living Faith's new name "much better reflects what's happening within our church." —Jack Jenkins, RNS

People

■ **Samuel T. Lloyd III**, who is credited with revitalizing Washington National Cathedral during his six years as the cathedral's dean, is resigning in September to return to Trinity Church in Boston's Copley Square as priest-in-charge. Lloyd, 61, strengthened the cathedral's Episcopal identity by establishing a 1,000-member congregation for Sunday morning worship and exceeded fund-raising goals in the last two years. Lloyd said he looked forward to preaching and teaching at Trinity Church, where he served as rector for 12 years.

■ At the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, the troubled congregation announced in early July that, contrary to some reports, founder **Robert H. Schuller** was not voted off the board of directors because he wanted to add new members to the board. Rather, he was given a nonvoting position as honorary board chairman emeritus some weeks earlier, a spokesperson said. The Reformed Church in America congregation has filed for bankruptcy protection and has been listening to offers to lease some buildings on its campus in hopes of paying off creditors. The Catholic Diocese of Orange expressed interest in purchasing the worship center as its cathedral.

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, August 14

Genesis 43:1-15; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32;
Matthew 23:10-20, 23-28

MY GRANDMOTHER WAS from a part of the world that no longer exists. As an immigrant to the U.S. between two wars, she saw people raped and murdered and towns plundered. Until she died she continued to express strong feelings about people and places—feelings that seemed only bizarre and paranoid to me, her young granddaughter. When I began to want to know more about her life, I realized that no traditional research would unearth the facts about her hometown, her birth or her baptism—the records had disappeared in a blaze of ethnic obliteration.

How was my grandmother able to live with her memories and also continue to hope and love? Hope and love she did for 84 years, with her strong political opinions, a tendency to fuss and mispronounce English words, a love of music and dancing, an inordinate fear for my father's safety and success, and an amazing capacity to create beautiful things out of bits and pieces of fabric. I spent many weekends in my room in her home, with a picture of Jesus at my bedside and a portrait of three angels above the bed. The dresser drawers were filled with remnants of fabric that she had collected. I loved to touch the pieces of cloth and imagine what she would create with them. When she died, it was the fabric that I remembered. The sight. The smell. The touch. The possibilities.

Matthew's Gospel reflects a world that was changing. Boundaries were shifting; people were afraid. Matthew's community needed to offer the gospel to a larger world and to people whom these early Christians had considered beyond the scope of their mission. Rules were changing too. Chapter 15 tells a frank story about how difficult it is to reach across deeply engrained differences. Polarization is built into us: good and bad, us and them. "Love God and love your neighbor as yourself" is a corrective to the tendency to draw closer within the lines of "our kind." Circles of affiliation give us identity, but they can be as blinding as they are solidifying. The woman of Canaan provides a model of what it is like to see beyond our immediate worldview. Here Jesus is not kind and open; he turns her down. The woman is not fazed even by her own prejudice. She confesses and proclaims. She asks for mercy, acknowledging that Jesus has no justification for dealing with her. She acknowledges who he is: Lord, Son of David. She passes a relationship checkpoint, entering into his world in the hope that he will see her in a different way. She does not give in or give up until Jesus responds and heals her.

What might it mean to be able to see the message of Jesus as something not bound by history, lineage or past understandings? What might God be turning upside down for our sake today? Can we as communities of faith be clear about who we are? Can we see with new eyes what God might be requiring of us? Scientists have a name for our tendency to see only what we have experienced before; they call it "operational blindness." As parents, political leaders, teenagers, faith communities and leaders, we often appear just as focused on one route as the racehorses that are lining up at a starting line.

Like the Canaanite women, each of us engages in confession and proclamation. How do we move more effectively from belief to action and make our discipleship more vital? Ronald Heifetz of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government uses images that are helpful for the human plight of what could be called "functional blindness." Heifetz talks about engagement in relationships as a "dance." The need to stay connected to the dance is profound. All of us dance, whether we think we can or not. Heifetz challenges each dancer to take a breather on the balcony once in a while as a discipline. We need to take time to observe, and to acknowledge that there is truth in the bigger picture. This rhythm of dance and observation will expand our worldviews and allow disciples to be able to engage in developing their own presence—a place between the inner life of faith and the outer life of living into the world.

In *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within*, Robert Quinn describes the ability to "travel naked into the land of uncertainty" and "building a bridge as we travel on it." As Christians, we must take risks and think in ways never imagined. What does it take for us to cross physical, mental or spiritual boundary lines for political, economic or spiritual reasons? What does it take for a mother, desperately seeking healing for a child, to face down cultural taboos and cry, "I believe!" and "I know that you, Jesus, are the source of this healing"? What is our boundary challenge today? Can we clarify what we believe in order to see God in the midst of seismic, tectonic shifts of our ecosystem, our political systems and our religious life?

Paul reveals that just as his story is a sign of God's constancy, so future followers will be examples of that grace. As God's people, we are the remnants and promise of new life. As communities of God's people, we carry the remembrance of God's love and gifts into the world. Our callings and gifts as disciples are never in question. God's love is irrevocable, and it goes with us as we explore a new road in hope and in love.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, August 21

Exodus 17-21; 1 Peter 1:1-12; Matthew 16:1-21

THE DAY BEGAN with a worship service that was filled with a bittersweet sense of endings and beginnings. There was a procession of joy as seminary graduates were honored and celebrated. There were tables and tables of food, and young people posing for photos with their arms linked. We heard expressions of gratitude and were introduced to families that we'd heard about but never met. Every year the seminary sends out gifted leaders into a crazy, exciting time, and staff members wonder: How will they be challenged by a vocation that will include both loss and hope? Will they see that the constant struggle with what it means to believe and to be is a gift? They will, without a doubt, learn that truth, pain, loss and hope are all part of a pastor's daily liturgy.

After experiencing my own hope and joy in the day's festivities, I sped down the highway fueled by celebration-day adrenaline but also by sadness. I was traveling to visit a friend in hospice care. Then a sign came into view:

Could a view into the chasm of death and loss be an opportunity for reaffirming what I believe?

Judgment Day, May 21, 6 p.m.

"Cry mightily unto God. The Bible guarantees it."

How could I have forgotten the end-times prediction? I checked my watch. It was almost time for the moment of accountability. I stopped the car and took a photo of the sign to memorialize the day. What might it mean to face God on this day, fully knowing who and what we believe? Could I do it? Can I shape my faith in a clear way as I stand facing a future that included the loss of a dear friend?

Soon I was at Linda's bedside, where she was surrounded by family members. Linda is a 52-year-old woman of strength and clarity. She is powerful and kind but had become tiny and vulnerable within the past month. When I saw her a week ago, she was tired but determined to eat out. We shared strawberry shortcake—her favorite, she said. But in a short week much has changed. Tonight her arms and legs are retracting. Her eyes are wide open and staring. I am not sure what she sees. She knits her brow. We want to talk, but I am the only one speaking, as she cannot. I thank her for our friendship. I talk about our road trip a year ago and my sadness that our plans for another never came to be. I tell her that I love her and that I promise to follow through on a request she'd made when she was diagnosed.

This is my friend, but I am a pastor too, and I feel drawn to do something. With my right thumb on her forehead, I trace the sign that we hold in common. One stroke down, then gently side to side. She closes her eyes and sighs. I bow my head.

I walk out of the hospice aware of what it might mean to face a future that is not what was expected, predicted or even considered. That reality has never been more earth-shattering for me. Could it be that a view into the chasm of death and loss might be an opportunity for reaffirming what I believe? My friend will soon complete a life on earth after a yearlong fight. She expected she would win and live. She was frightened, determined and curious, all at the same time. She also believes that Jesus has called her into life and that death is not the final story. Is she right?

What does it mean to be the people who are left? What does it mean for an entire community to live as though it is facing its final hours? How do its members carry on with the memories,

the promises and the belief made clear to the world? How do I live into a grace that entreates, invites and demonstrates a belief in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting?

The predicted time of rapture has passed, and I've had a glimpse of heaven. I sat with my friend and saw the past, the present and the future on her forehead. My challenge is to carry what I believe until the time when my body retracts and my life merges into memory, remembrance and incorporation into the future.

Martin Luther wrote: "I care not whether he be Christ, but that he be Christ for you."

Jesus, at the point of Peter's statement of faith, gave him a new name. Life as he knew it would never be the same again.

I see the image of the cross on Linda's forehead. I hear her sigh, and I bow my head again. Life will never be the same. Jesus the Christ. Painbearer. Lifegiver. Source of grace, challenge and hope.

The author is Emlyn A. Ott, assistant professor of ministry and pastoral leadership at Trinity Lutheran Seminary and executive director of Healthy Congregations, Inc., in Columbus, Ohio.

The community schools movement

Reform that works

by Amy Frykholm

THE 2010 DOCUMENTARY film *Waiting for Superman*, about the failures of the American education system, includes the story of a fifth-grader named Daisy. She is bright, passionate and charismatic. Though the child of a custodian and a high school dropout, she dreams of being a doctor or a veterinarian. You can see the American dream gleaming in her eyes.

The filmmakers point out, however, that at the high school Daisy will attend, only six out of ten students graduate and very few of those graduates go on to college. Regardless of Daisy's gifts and motivation, her chances of achieving her dream are very slim.

Nearly everyone agrees that the American education system needs to do better by Daisy and the millions of children like her. Linda Darling-Hammond, a professor at Stanford University, has charged that America's education system borders on being an apartheid system in which the children of the wealthy enjoy the latest equipment and a rich curriculum and are put on the track to college while only one in ten low-income students goes to college and a higher percentage see the inside of a prison. Some states, says Darling-Hammond, can predict their future need for prison beds based on third-grade reading scores.

During the most recent economic downturn, people who lacked a high school education were the most likely to be unemployed, and those unemployed were disproportionately black and Latino, the product of struggling schools nationwide, but especially in urban areas. Activist Marian Wright Edelman calls this part of the American education system the "cradle-to-prison pipeline."

Since 2002 the main national vehicle for addressing failing students and failing schools has been the No Child Left Behind program. Backed by President George W. Bush and Senator Ted Kennedy, the legislation was a bipartisan effort that focused on accountability and testing. It mandated that each state develop a standardized test that would be issued to all children between grades three and eight. (It allowed each state to determine the content of these tests.) In schools where children showed poor test results, the federal government would provide help, but after six years of failure, the school would be called on to close or relinquish ownership to a private party. The law further mandated that all children be "proficient" in grade-level reading and math by 2014.

No Child Left Behind has provoked a storm of criticism. Some educators say it has had the effect of narrowing the curriculum to the teaching of rote facts. Its strictures have meant that some 80 percent of America's schools are deemed fail-

ing—which only further demoralizes hard-working staff and faculty. The law is set to be renewed this fall, but it's unclear whether Congress will want to revise it or scrap it.

Meanwhile, various other reform movements have made their case. Joe Klein, former chancellor of the New York City school system, thinks that NCLB is on the right track and that public schools that fail their students should close their doors and give others in the community a chance at running schools. Klein, like the makers of *Waiting for Superman*, believes that school choice in the form of public vouchers and charter schools is the best vehicle for change.

The school choice movement has drawn the attention of private foundations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation,

For too many, schools are only a pipeline to prison.

the Walton Foundation (which funded *Waiting for Superman*), the Broad Foundation and the DeVos Foundation. These foundations have been pouring money into experimental and innovative schools, while traditional public schools have been desperate for funding. There are now more than 5,000 charter schools in the U.S., educating more than 1 million students.

Despite the message of *Waiting for Superman*, the success of charter schools is quite varied, says New York University education professor Diane Ravitch. In fact, any evidence that charter schools make a difference for students in poor neighborhoods is hard to come by. Research shows that, with some exceptions, charter schools are most successful in raising achievement levels (defined as scores on standardized tests) when they can preclude the enrollment of the children least likely to succeed—a requirement public schools cannot impose. A recent study by Stanford University showed that while 17 percent of charter schools provide a "superior" education for children, most show results equal to traditional schools and 37 percent show worse results.

Another group of reformers emphasizes not so much creating successful schools as fostering excellent teachers. A representative figure of this movement is Michelle Rhee, who to much fanfare took over the struggling Washington, D.C., school system in 2008. She quickly dismissed 241 teachers who she did not think were doing their jobs. She boasted about her

own teaching performance and the effect that it had on test scores in a poor district in Baltimore: “Those kids, where they lived didn’t change. Their parents didn’t change. Their diets didn’t change. The only thing that changed for those 70 kids was the adults who were in front of them every single day teaching them.” Rhee, who faced strong opposition from teachers, resigned her post in 2010.

Inspired by figures like Rhee, many states are proposing ways to improve teaching or to fire teachers who fail to improve test scores. The movement has support from President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Obama has backed the idea of rewarding excellent teaching with merit pay, an idea that on the surface seems hard to argue with. Teachers are chronically underpaid and are often blamed for the ills of education. To reward those who do their jobs exceptionally well might offer teachers a just recompense.

Teachers fear, however, that the movement for merit pay is likely to judge them solely on the basis of test scores—a very narrow definition of success that may, in fact, miss the most significant moments of teaching and learning. Mike Rose, a professor at UCLA, spent a year traveling around the country in search of “great teaching” moments (see his book *Possible Lives*). “The good classroom,” he concluded (writing in a recent issue of *Dissent* magazine), “is rich in small moments of intelligence and care.” Good teaching involves careful attention to context, to opportunity and to the dynamics of individual children. Great teaching cannot be measured by what Rose calls the “technocratic-managerial orientation.”

Focusing on “teacher success” may also have the opposite of the desired effect for children in low-income neighborhoods. Teachers who work with children who are most challenged academically are less likely to get “results.” As education journalist Dana Goldstein says, “This model stacks the deck against teachers who work with high-poverty, academically struggling students.” Students who start out the year with already decent test scores are those most likely to show progress. Progress for students whose lives may otherwise be chaotic is slower and harder to come by. Paying teachers more who are able to show progress may discourage educators from working with educationally struggling students.

The idea of merit pay troubles Carl Weaver, a 30-year veteran of the classroom, because he thinks this focus is a distraction from poverty and the role it plays in education. In contrast to Rhee and Klein, Weaver believes that income level is a critical factor in student success.

“Studies show that poverty—the way these young children enter the classroom—has everything to do with their success later on.” The movements for merit pay, for charter schools or for No Child Left Behind each skirts the issue of poverty in order to lay blame somewhere else.

Romal Tune is another reformer who thinks that issues of poverty cannot be avoided. Poverty itself is a shorthand expression for a myriad of problems and circumstances. He remembers when he was a struggling student in “failing” urban schools. He switched schools every year until the 11th grade. Tune recalls a day when he was 11 years old. His mother handed him money for bus fare to get to and from school but said



she didn’t have any money to give him for lunch. As the school day progressed, Tune got hungrier and hungrier. He knew that he faced certain humiliation from the other children if he confessed that he didn’t have lunch money, so he decided to spend his bus fare on lunch.

At the end of the school day, he avoided the other children as long as he could and then started asking strangers on the street for bus fare. Most of them looked away, but one woman finally looked him in the eyes, smiled and said, “What do you need to get home?”

What that gift of \$1.25 meant to him has stayed with Tune all of his life. It’s evidence to him of what the kindness of a stranger, someone simply willing to pay attention, can do.

Tune has launched an organization called Faith for Change, a consortium of churches in seven cities that are committed to working with public schools by supplying tutors, books, mentoring, emergency funds, dental and medical clinics and counseling. Tune believes that this kind of support is crucial: “The theme for children who succeed when their circumstances are against them is that someone cared. When they tell their stories, they don’t mention how they were taught, but how they were talked to.”

Tune is part of a wave of education reformers who are trying to shift the focus from test scores to the broader circumstances of children’s lives. Education reformer David Kirp has sketched perhaps the clearest vision for this approach in his book *Kids First: Five Big Ideas for Transforming Children’s Lives and America’s Future*. Kirp’s five “big ideas” include parental education, strong early childhood programs, mentoring programs, and universal savings accounts for every child. The fifth idea is what he calls the community school—a school that is a community center, a place where children connect with the broader society. Community schools thrive on alliances with local churches, synagogues, mosques and nonprofit organizations.

The Coalition for Community Schools, a branch of the Institute for Educational Leadership, is collecting data, disseminating information, creating partnerships and trying to put weight behind the idea that children thrive with strong community support. The first official community school was instituted in the late 1990s. Some 5,000 schools have adopted some aspect of

People who disagree on theology can agree on helping children to read.

the community school strategy—a tiny percentage of the nation’s more than 100,000 schools, but still a significant number.

Shital Shah, manager of policy at the Coalition for Community Schools, tries to avoid many of the debates that currently inflame education activists. She does not want to be drawn into a conversation about, say, the pros and cons of charter schools. “We are focused on figuring out how to support schools no matter what kind they are.”

Explains Shah, “Community schools draw on local partnerships to meet student needs in order to create the conditions for learning.” Specifically, the coalition helps schools find the resources to hire a coordinator who can work with local

Maybe the future is a story that hates to wait

Me, personally, I think stories are starving to be told. I think there are millions there, jostling and elbowing To get to the parachute bay and snatching any chance Whatsoever, no matter how remote, to get themselves Told at last, or retold—the latter meaning born again, Really. Consider the immortality implications of *that*. Maybe stories are like kids who are ideas before flesh. Maybe kids are ideas who get laboriously fleshed out, Like novels. Maybe children are made of stories more Than they are of bone and hair and turkey sandwiches. Maybe the way to think of a teenager is as a wry story That’s all verb and no object as yet. Maybe we guzzle Forty stories with every breath we draw and they soak Into us and flavor and thicken and spice the wild stew We are. Maybe we are all the stories we ever told and Will tell when they let us see their gleaming first lines. Maybe the future means a vast story that hates to wait. Maybe we are made of more stories we forgot than of Stories we think to remember. Maybe what we forget Are stories that realize they were in the wrong mouth. Maybe every story has to find the right teller. Maybe I Had to wait all this time to be able to tell you this story.

Brian Doyle

churches, mosques, synagogues, nonprofits or any community agency to provide resources so that students can be ready to learn. Both Shah and Tune see community schools as a way to stop playing the blame game. They don’t blame teachers, unions, administrators or parents. They assume that everyone is invested in seeing children flourish.

Community schools are supported on a national level by federal grants, but they work out the specifics on a community-by-community basis. In one community, a church has agreed to supplement the diet of schoolchildren whose nutritional needs are not being met. Congregation members take food to families that are identified by the school district as being in need. In another school district, a nonprofit organization provides every child with school supplies. The myriad of needs and the multitude of ways to meet those needs—by supplying dental clinics, or lice shampoo, or counseling—suggests an alternative to hierarchy-heavy, top-down policies. Because contemporary school reform is intensely data-driven, Tune and Shah are focused on producing evidence that the community schools strategy works.

An example of the community schools movement is the work of the Salazar Partnership in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The partnership emerged at the United Church of Santa Fe (UCC) following a presentation at the church by Vicky Sewing, principal of Salazar Elementary School. She spoke about the challenges at Salazar, where all students were eligible for a government-funded lunch program, 8 percent were homeless and 60 percent needed help learning English. Sewing identified a lack of parent involvement as one of many problems that the school faced.

Among those who heard Sewing speak that day were Bill and Georgia Carson, newcomers to Santa Fe. They approached Sewing and asked, “What can we do?”

Out of that meeting, seven volunteers from the church began to read to children in kindergarten classes at Salazar. Thirteen years later, with over 70 volunteers, the Salazar Partnership works with two low-income schools. It provides readers, mentors, books, equipment and medical clinics and even obtains private funds to pay the salaries of physical education teachers, nurses and clerical staff. It is a thriving organization that is only now beginning to formalize its relationship to the schools.

“We know what we are doing works,” says Bill Carson. “But proving it to the state is another matter.” While the partnership can count the number of books it has given away through the Reading Is Fundamental organization (whose funding was recently cut out of the federal budget), it cannot count the effect of putting books in homes where there are none. That effect will not be known until much later.

“Each child at Salazar Elementary will leave our school with a library of 21 books,” noted Sewing. “We think this is significant.”

The pastor at United Church, Talitha Arnold, points out that the partnership with the schools, which now goes beyond the confines of her church, is important not only to students but to church members. It connects hand-on support with the work of outreach and advocacy. Spending time in city schools prompts members to ask, “Why are these schools so much more poorly funded than the schools where my children and grandchildren are?”

Every year, the church holds a commissioning ceremony for those who volunteer to work at the schools. Arnold has noticed that people who may disagree about church politics or about theology or social issues can agree on the importance of reading to a child. Ideological adversaries become partners in service to the community.

Many people in the congregation say that volunteering in Salazar's classrooms is the most important thing they do all week. One woman told Arnold that it has been the most important work she has ever done.

Sewing doesn't see the community school concept as a panacea, though she has seen student performance improve. "The partnership with United Church was key," she says. "But as a struggling school, you've got to do and try everything. I can't say that the volunteers made the final difference, because we were trying a dozen other things at the same time. Together all of it worked and is working."

The partnership with United Church has done two things that Sewing would love to see replicated all over the country. First, the children in Sewing's school get special, one-on-one time with an adult. "That," she says, echoing the views of Romal Tune, "can make all the difference for a child, especially if that is tied to learning to read." When children are connected to adults who are mentors and "reading buddies," they value what they are learning. "We know for a fact that if children don't learn to read, they aren't going to make it."

Second, says Sewing, the volunteers have become advocates for her school. The debate over public schools is heated, and many people are hearing only the negative stories. Sewing notes that through the Salazar Partnership some 70 people in the community have passed through the doors of her school and spent time with teachers and students. They are in a position to respond when critical comments are made. "They say, 'I see wonderful things happening. I see teaching and learning. I see teachers who really care, who are working hard.' That kind of PR is priceless."

The social problems that make learning difficult for children have not gone away. Every year, Salazar welcomes children who are behind before they begin. There is no state standardized test in the world that can make up for lost time, and progress is slow.

The key to a thriving school is to get

everyone working together: parents and teachers, volunteers and administrators, people with resources and people without. Community schools take up this challenge by providing assistance across the spectrum of need. Rather than point the finger at teachers or administrators or public schools, they invest in all of them, believing that the success of any school depends on the support of the community. While the community school movement remains small, its thousands of participants remain committed to the idea that one can make a difference in a school and in the life of a child just by paying attention and asking, "What do you need?"



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Suburban search for meaning

by Lillian Daniel

IN MY SUBURBAN neighborhood, we rarely see our neighbors during the winter. We pull our cars straight into the garage, which in some cases leads us straight into the house without ever having to feel the cold or see the sky. Rushing back and forth to work, to school, to the grocery store and to the countless appointments of our overscheduled children, it is possible to forget whether you know anybody you have not made an appointment to see. That is my excuse for the winter months. So how do I account for the spring?

Last fall, our neighbors directly across the street moved and sold their house to a family who are members and regular attenders of the church I have served for the past seven years. I see them on Sundays, but it took me three months to figure out that they had moved into the house across the street.

During those months, I would see Tracy running or walking her dog and I would think, "It's interesting that her route takes her to my block these days." I saw her enter the house across the street in her running clothes and acting with the confidence of someone who lived there ("Gosh, does she know the new neighbors? I should ask her about them since I've not yet met them"). And one day I saw her emerging from the house with her dog ("Why is Tracy's dog inside my neighbor's house?"). Finally it dawned on me.

In theory, I consider myself to be a person who values and appreciates community. As a pastor I do all I can to foster community in my church. But in practice, I have not been a very good neighbor.

Peter Lovenheim was forced to wrestle with this problem after a disaster struck in his posh suburb of New York. A mother of two was shot and killed by her husband, who then shot himself, leaving their two children to run out into the streets in the dark, screaming for help at a neighbor's door. An elderly couple took the children in and later hosted family members for the funerals and the aftermath. In the wake of that event, Lovenheim realized that he knew almost nothing about the lives of his neighbors.

He decided to learn more about the family that had seemed so happy but clearly was not. The parents were two successful doctors who worked out together at the gym, played tennis and seemed to balance family life and work easily. But in visiting with the mother's family and friends, Lovenheim uncovered a different story. The husband had been mentally unbalanced and raging for a while. The mar-

In the Neighborhood: The Search for Community on an American Street, One Sleepover at a Time

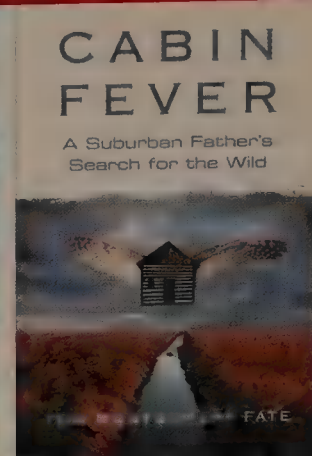
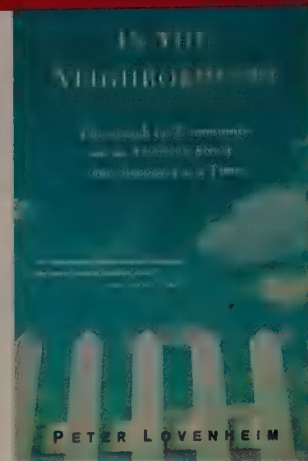
By Peter Lovenheim

Perigee, 256 pp., \$13.95 paperback

Cabin Fever: A Suburban Father's Search for the Wild

By Tom Montgomery Fate

Beacon, 224 pp., \$24.95



riage was ending. On the night the man shot his wife, she had spent the whole day and evening repeatedly calling her best friend, who lived 20 minutes away, leaving numerous messages to ask if she and the kids could come over because she was uneasy about her husband's state of mind. But the friend was not reachable, and the mother made the fateful decision to go home anyway.

After her murder, the woman's friend felt guilt-ridden for not having been available to her best friend, though it was through no fault of her own. Lovenheim became tortured with the thought that haunted the murdered woman's best friend and her family: Why did she go home that night? And could it have been different?

But Lovenheim had another question. Why hadn't the woman gone to her neighbors? Why hadn't she knocked on the door of a nearby neighbor—or anyone's door—and said, "I don't feel safe"? Why had she called one friend over and over again, but not called on the help closest at hand, a neighbor?

The answer, he decided, had to do with the isolation of his affluent neighborhood. Living in their large houses on big lots, on the fanciest and most prestigious street in the area, the residents had all bought into the American dream, but with it they had bought into isolation. The children set up play dates rather than gathering in the street, and they learned their behavior from the adults, who met friends at the tennis club, not on the sidewalk.

In this New York suburb, people talked late into the night on their cell phones with best friends who lived miles away, while on their own street they knew very little about one

Lillian Daniel is senior pastor at First Congregational Church (UCC) in Glen Ellyn, Illinois.

another—certainly not enough to ask for help at a vulnerable time. The murdered woman had probably thought that to knock on a neighbor's door would be embarrassing, would be making a big to-do of nothing. Perhaps she thought that once behind her own closed doors in a large and lovely house, she and her husband could endure one more night of pretending that everything was fine.

From that grisly incident came a good book for anybody who can't name their neighbors and a book that's even better for those who can and do appreciate them. Deciding to get to know his neighbors, Lovenheim embarked on a project to meet them one by one. He asked his neighbors to do something that is in some ways natural and in some ways totally unnatural in the suburban world: he asked his neighbors if he could spend the night.

The book he wrote based on this experience is a poignant and often hilarious description of what he discovered behind his neighbors' doors—from a real estate agent considering leaving her husband to a brave single mother with terminal cancer to a lonely retired doctor who later becomes that single mother's caregiver and driver. Lovenheim not only got to know his neighbors, but he lets us know them too—which in turn makes us want to know our own neighbors.

The book poses a profoundly theological question: Could we, in the busyness of our lives, be missing out on the very people that God intends for us to meet? Throughout scripture we

Are we missing the very people God wants us to meet?

are told to love our neighbor. We are not told to love our friends and family; that is assumed. We're told to do something harder—love our neighbors.

Not surprisingly, more than a few people turned down Lovenheim's request to spend the night. Imagine the response on your street if a neighbor you hardly knew approached people with such a proposition. But enough people said yes to Lovenheim to change the fabric of the neighborhood and to lead him to write this remarkable book. It would be trite to say that neighbors became friends, although that did happen in some cases. But by the end of the sleepover project, neighbors did become neighbors in the theological sense of the word—people who could nurse one another through loss of love and even loss of life by practicing real hospitality. Many were able to knock on one another's doors in a time of trouble and tell the truth about their messy lives.

Lovenheim refers periodically to his synagogue and the meaning that worship brings to his life. It comes as no surprise that a practicing Jew wrote this challenging and wise book, which centers on the desire to practice and to receive hospitality, a major theme of Judaism. He is clearly motivated by concerns greater than the social pressures of belonging, and greater even than the loneliness he felt during the unraveling of his own marriage and his divorce. When he

describes his passion for hospitality, he sounds like a man with a calling.

Another suburban dad on a spiritual quest has also written a book that hits close to home—it's about the suburb in which I live, Glen Ellyn, Illinois. Tom Montgomery Fate's charming volume is about his search for meaning in the suburbs, a search that takes him to the woods of Michigan where he builds his own cabin.

A writer, professor of English at the College of DuPage and commentator for NPR, Montgomery Fate decided to live half his life in Glen Ellyn and half as a writer in the woods, going back and forth between two very different worlds. That journey takes him into a deep reading of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, which begins with these words from July 4, 1845, Thoreau's own personal Independence Day:

When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labor of my hands only. I lived there two years and two months. At present I am a sojourner in civilized life again.

Thoreau once said, "I went to the woods to live deliberately." Montgomery Fate playfully turns that statement upside down by saying, "I got married and had children because I wanted to live deliberately."

What makes *Cabin Fever* such good reading is that the author doesn't try to be a modern-day Thoreau. He acknowledges at the outset that his life is different from the transcendentalist's. Unlike Thoreau, Montgomery Fate has a family, a job, bills to pay and a house in the suburbs. But he still wonders about the deep questions of life, like whether he should get a BlackBerry device to stay in better touch with the office or whether he should resist the pull of technology that can distract us as much as it helps us. What leads to more understanding and community, and what communication actually leads to less? Here's Montgomery Fate on being tempted to get a BlackBerry:

My problem is that I both fear and need one. I need one to help get organized and caught up. Like most people, my life sometimes slips into sprawl mode—unchecked growth in too many directions: work, marriage, three kids in three schools, committees, church, friends, neighbors, and on and on. I don't handle this well. The e-mails and texts telling me where to be and what to do and how to vote sometimes pile up into a mountain of information I don't know how to climb. I'm not sure why. Maybe because nowhere in all those thousands of words is the gentle anchor of the human voice.

He ponders the hard questions of parenting, of loving a wife through a health scare, of saying goodbye to the family's 21-year-old cat. Like Lovenheim, he talks honestly about the strain of living in a fast-paced suburb where people not only



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tend to ignore their human neighbors but don't really pay attention to the birds, the trees, the bugs and the stars. It's the quest to know creation more deeply that takes Montgomery Fate and his family to a communal farm in Michigan where eventually he builds himself a cabin and comes to spend time there in solitude and writing.

Had Montgomery Fate simply abandoned his family and moved to the cabin to ponder the meaning of life, I would have hated this book. But the family is part of the cabin life too, part of the work of repairing walls and exploring paths—or being longed for when they are absent.

And had the author devoted the whole book to the time at the cabin, I would have liked it less than I do. Then the book would be in the same category as Thoreau's *Walden*, an interesting fantasy but one utterly unavailable to me and at some level unappealing because of the author's isolation. My own family means far too much to me to make me want to live in a cabin in a woods, although like others I do have days when I can see the attraction in such a life.

The magic of *Cabin Fever* is the author's willingness to move back and forth between the two worlds of hectic suburbs and the more isolated nature-soaked cabin. In one chapter we are with him as he repairs the cabin steps, and in the next scene we are with him as he tries to trim a tree in his own backyard. Both projects are well beyond his skill level, but the Thoreau in him wants to try. But unlike Thoreau's book, Montgomery Fate's includes a conversation with his wife, who makes him promise to stay away from chain saws and power lines (and includes his own admission that, like so many do-it-yourselfer husbands, he probably won't keep that promise).

The lure of the wilderness is far more interesting when contrasted to the lure of family life. By exploring the beauty of the countryside in Michigan, the author teaches us to see the beauty of the backyard bird feeder and the trees around the power lines.

Still pondering that BlackBerry purchase, Montgomery Fate writes:

As the technology gets smarter and faster, I get dumber and slower, and more distracted. This became clear to me last week when I again lost my car in the college parking lot. After a ten-minute search in the rain on the acre of blacktop, I finally found it. I pretended that I knew where I was going, but it was embarrassing. And last month, I found my billfold in the cheese drawer of the refrigerator after I finally decided to stop looking for it and finish making my lunch. And more than once I've been sur-

prised at a stop sign, when a ceramic mug of hot coffee comes flying off the roof of my car, bounces off the hood, and shatters on the street. Perhaps these are all signs of something ominous, or of something increasingly common: living between the past and the future, but never quite in the present.

By digging deeply into the ordinary moments of life, he teaches all of us how to pay better attention.

What I hear from both of these writers is exactly what I have been longing to hear in these months of news stories about famous men—Arnold Schwarzenegger and Anthony Weiner, among others—behaving badly. It is the sound of men thinking deeply. Their dense musings are the opposite of the Facebook post or the tweet. These are books you want to spend some time with. Both authors paint a picture of the suburban dad that goes far beyond the stereotype of the golf-playing, beer-drinking, polo shirt-wearing, sports-loving, hail-fellow-well-met. There is much more going on under the facades of male success in the suburbs, and these two men give those struggles dignity. There is more to life than landing the big house, or the right car, or having a family that appears perfect. Our relationships matter. Our churches and synagogues matter. Our ability to live in the present matters. The Holy Spirit is among us, even in the most ordinary places. You just can't tweet that stuff, thank God.

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What is pastoral ministry like these days, and how is it being shaped in new ways? The *Century* talked to pastors about the challenges and surprises of their early years in ministry. This interview is the second in a series.

MINISTRY

IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Bearing testimony

Katherine Willis Pershey
Western Springs, Illinois



*Katherine Willis Pershey is a graduate of Claremont School of Theology in California. After serving as the pastor of a Disciples of Christ congregation in California, she took a call to be associate minister at First Congregational Church (UCC) in Western Springs, Illinois. Her book *Any Day a Beautiful Change* is forthcoming from Chalice Press.*

What excites you most about ministry these days?

I've always felt lucky to do what I do for a living. Ministry is just so interesting. That seems like such a weak word, but I'm genuinely interested in nearly every aspect of my work—I'm never bored. I engage in wonderfully diverse projects alongside wonderfully diverse people, and it all happens in a context of intentional openness to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

What does this openness look like in practice?

I think it's primarily a matter of seeing ordinary activities through the lens of faith. The renewed emphasis on Christian practice has been such a gift to the church. Telling your story is so much more meaningful when you understand that you are bearing testimony; calling on a sick parishioner takes a different shape when you recognize that both patient and pastor reflect the face of Christ. As Craig Dykstra says, practices are "patterns of communal action that create openings in our lives where the grace, mercy and presence of God may be made known to us."

In our weekly staff meetings, my colleagues and I spend as much time in reflection about the previous week as we do in preparation for the weeks to come. Our Sunday school classes and small group studies always begin or end with time to share prayer requests. That's certainly not a revolutionary practice, but it cultivates from an early age the ability to articulate one's own joys and sorrows, the capacity to bear the joys and sorrows of one's neighbor and, as we pray for one another, a fundamental trust in the compassion of God.

Often I fail to truly open myself to the Holy Spirit, but when I do take the time to pay attention—even in retrospect—it's astounding to note how fully God is present in my life and the life of the church.

What's been the hardest part of parish ministry?

Leaving my first call was heartbreaking. Congregations—especially small, struggling congregations—need loving pastors. I loved that church, and I am still processing how to keep loving that church though I'm no longer its minister. It was a very odd experience: you don't stop being someone's sister or daughter, yet one day I was their pastor and the next I was not. It was a grief-laden process.

What was the grieving process like?

I was thrilled about my new call, but I cradled a lot of guilt

and sadness about leaving. On my last weekend as pastor, the congregation celebrated its 100th anniversary. It was a lovely commemoration of their longevity and faithfulness—and a great reminder that a church is so much more than any one minister. Still, leaving right after such a momentous event made the departure seem sudden, even though we had been preparing practically and spiritually for months. The moving truck came to the parsonage the next day, while the archival displays in the fellowship hall were still being dismantled.

For several months I could hardly think about the members of that church without feeling deep sadness. But they are thriving, and I'm thrilled about where I am now. My husband and I wanted to return to the Midwest, and I felt called to associate ministry.

Say more about that specific sense of calling.

I struggled to carry the pastoral burden alone, so the opportunity to work with colleagues was very appealing to me. I appreciate the depth that associate ministry affords. I'm able to dedicate more time and energy to particular areas of responsibility instead of feeling continually overstretched.

I was fairly anxious about the transition from working autonomously to having a supervisor. But I'm blessed to work with a wonderful senior pastor; in a relatively short time, we've established a great sense of collegiality and mutual respect.

What does your denominational affiliation mean to you?

I'm ordained to the Disciples of Christ, a denomination I joined as an adult. I deeply appreciate the ethos and community of my denomination; we are small enough that we generally know one another fairly well. I've been active in both the regional and general manifestations of the church, and I genuinely love to attend its general assemblies.

What led you to join the Disciples? What tradition were you coming out of?

I grew up United Methodist, and during college I worshiped at an Episcopal church and with a Friends meeting. I wanted to be a pastor, but neither itinerancy nor the priesthood appealed to me, and though Quaker theology resonated with me, I couldn't reconcile the absence of ritual sacraments and ordained ministry. The chaplain of United Christian Ministries at Kent State University was a Disciple, and while I think she refrained from inviting me to her church out of respect for my denominational roots, I visited anyway. It felt like home, and I joined almost immediately.

I'm at a church now that's affiliated with the United Church of Christ, and while I love where I am, I miss the Disciples practices of weekly communion and baptism by immersion. I didn't expect to grow attached to the latter; it was one of the things I accepted with a raised eyebrow in the first place. The whole thing just seemed a little old-timey to me; I associated it with fanatics and fundamentalists, not progressive Christians. Fortunately, I had been baptized as an infant, which worked as a get-out-of-jail-free card: since Disciples are almost universally opposed to rebaptism, I could join without getting my hair wet.

And then, not far into my first call, one of the church's

teenagers decided she was ready to make the good confession of faith and be baptized. I was thrilled—and petrified. I guess I had known I wasn't going to get away with staying dry forever, but the whole idea was so intimidating. There are logistics involved with immersion baptisms, such as plumbing to contend with.

The woman who chaired the property committee saw the fear in my eyes and offered to do a trial run. We'd meet in our swimsuits a week before B-day and fill up the tank, and then I'd dip her as many times as it took to figure out how best to throw my strength to ensure that the sacrament didn't last uncomfortably long. In the baptistry, we giggled the whole time, joking about how holy she would be by the time I was



“There are a lot of hungry spirits in the church.”

through with her. I ended up immersing her a good seven or eight times. So much for not believing in rebaptism.

As I waded into the baptistry on the first Sunday of Advent—the thunderous words of John the Baptist ringing in my ears—I was ready. The teenager and I both surrendered that day as the water flowed between our fingers and toes. We agreed that it felt sort of like a bear hug from God, a goofy metaphor for a wonderfully goofy practice.

So, I miss immersion. But I happily participate in baptizing the infants of my new congregation, where, in the words of novelist Marilynne Robinson's John Ames, “the water just heightens the touch of the pastor's hand on the sweet bones of the head, sort of like making an electrical connection.”

Is your preference for immersion also a preference for believer's baptism?

It's really about the physicality, symbolism and beauty of immersion itself. To be honest, these aspects move me much more than any theological or biblical argument about believer's baptism.

How have pastors and others with more experience been helpful to you? Unhelpful?

I was one of the founding board members of the Young Clergy Women Project, and I have availed myself fully of its opportunities for peer support and continuing education. I'm easily irritated by more experienced clergy who presume that we cannot relate to one another as colleagues but only as mentor/mentee. I love mentors—I *collect* mentors—but I'm most drawn to pastors who don't condescend to their newest colleagues.

One of the most formative experiences I've had with other pastors was serving on the committee on ministry for the Pacific Southwest Region of the Disciples of Christ. I learned so much about ministry—both from my colleagues on the com-

mittee and from the candidates who were still working out what it meant for them to be called to serve God and the church.

Where else do you go for collegiality, inspiration and renewal?

On a daily basis, I turn to the staff at church. Having experienced the loneliness of serving as a solo pastor, I really cherish the gift of having in-house colleagues. Once a month, I meet with three other young clergywomen who also understand writing to be an integral part of their vocations—we are all alumni of the Collegeville Institute summer writing programs. Our stated purpose is to read and respond to one another's work, but the group also functions as a collegial support network and, quite frankly, the primary source of my social life. We've been gathering for several months, and no one has ever missed a meeting.

Do you see writing as an integral part of your vocation to ministry or something separate? Either way, how do you find the time?

I suppose it is part of my vocation to ministry. I don't think I would thrive as a pastor without writing, and I know I wouldn't want to pursue a writing career distinct from ministry. In addition to the writing that is inherent in pastoral ministry—sermons, letters, curricula and so on—writing for

publication beyond the congregation is one of the ways I live out my faith and calling.

Shortly after my first interview for my current position, Chalice Press offered me a book contract. I shared the news with the search committee and senior pastor, and as we moved through the discernment process, they made it clear that they didn't see the writing project as a hindrance to my ability to be a fully engaged minister. They embraced it as a ministry that could benefit both the congregation and a larger audience. My senior pastor encouraged me to consider writing part of my job description—and has followed through by offering me ample time to write.

Of course, one of my major areas of emphasis is ministry with young families, and my book is a memoir about motherhood, marriage and ministry. If I were writing mystery novels, the congregation might not be so enthusiastic.

What books have shaped your understanding of ministry?

Eugene Peterson's books are invaluable—challenging, if not downright convicting. He clearly expects a lot of ministers, as well one should. Before I met Peterson—at a workshop hosted by the Collegeville Institute—I assumed that he would be a stern and intimidating man. But he's delightful, a fount of gentle wisdom.

When I reread his books now, I still sometimes feel as though I've been called to the principal's office, but now I know the principal is soft-spoken and sparkly-eyed. He's also a model for me as I continue to try to weave writing into my life as a minister, as many of his books were written while he was in full-time pastoral ministry.

I wish I could have read *This Odd and Wondrous Calling* when I was in seminary. Lillian Daniel and Martin Copenhaver's book doesn't exactly shape my understanding of ministry; it perfectly reflects it.

How would you want to change your seminary curriculum?

I wish I had been better prepared to read the Bible within the context of a faith community. My biblical studies courses were exclusively academic in nature. Certainly the capacity to think critically about scripture is crucial. But exegesis doesn't feed spirits, and there are a lot of hungry spirits in the church.

Was there not much connection between your biblical studies and your preaching coursework?

Not especially. I did have an excellent preaching professor, with a background in New Testament studies—he did address the scholarly and pastoral dimensions of homiletics. But it was just one introductory preaching class; I remember

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wishing I could have taken my biblical studies courses with him as well.

Nevertheless, I cherish the years I spent at Claremont and am grateful for my seminary education.

What's your sermon-prep process? What resources do you find helpful?

During the summer, I plan out the scriptures I will preach on for the year. I usually preach the lectionary, especially since the publication of the Feasting on the Word series. That's my primary resource for study—the exegetical, pastoral, homiletical and theological perspectives are generally just the right amount

“We need to model authentic faith-sharing.”

and scope of material to spark a sermon idea. I preach from my written manuscripts word for word, but by Sunday I try to be familiar enough with my text that I only need to glance at it.

What developments would you like to see in your congregation's mission? In the wider church's?

I'm hopeful that the mainline church can reclaim meaningful, practical and theologically tenable practices of evangelism.

Martha Grace Reese provides an excellent road map in her Unbinding the Gospel series. I led an all-congregation program based on her work during my first call, and I'm in the process of reading and discussing it with the staff at my present church. At both congregations, people are reluctant to speak boldly about their faith. But people need to hear the good news of God's grace and love more than ever, and if the church doesn't take on this mission, I'm afraid—well, that's where that sentence can end: if the church doesn't take on this mission, I'm afraid.

What do the two churches you've served have in common that makes people similarly hesitant to share their faith?

They're pretty different places. South Bay Christian was declining; First Congregational is thriving. But they inhabit the same larger culture, a culture in which much of the language of the Christian faith is laced with connotations of fundamentalism. I think people just learn to be quiet about their faith, because that's the safe and polite thing to do. We need to reclaim our language, model authentic faith-sharing and gently invite people to do the same.

Describe an experience that made you think, “This is what church is all about.”

My congregation in California hosted a hot breakfast program on Sunday mornings before worship. Up to 75 homeless and low-income people came each week. When one of the regulars was ticketed for playing his trumpet on the Redondo Beach pier without a permit, our music director invited him to play in worship. The first time he played, there wasn't a dry eye in the place.

He began attending worship regularly, and eventually he joined the church. At his request, we located a social service organization that could provide housing and services for him. At one point, he lived with a roommate who had held onto the inventory from his family's musical instrument company, so one morning during church he presented me with a gift: a silver trombone. We played several duets together, including one at the congregation's 100th anniversary celebration.

The church's engagement with this gentleman has been challenging at times, as he continues to struggle with significant issues. Still, the congregation has exhibited great hospitality toward him. In the Disciples tradition, the communion service includes lay members praying for God's blessing on the bread and cup. South Bay Christian Church did not merely invite a homeless man to receive the gifts of grace; they ate bread that he had blessed.

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Faith MATTERS

by Carol Zaleski

The mass finds its voice

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED the mass in midair. At least, that's how it felt. I was lying on my stomach on the living room carpet in a Manhattan apartment 13 stories above ground, listening to my parents' recording of Bach's Mass in B Minor. I had never attended a religious service of any kind, but with the help of liner notes that included the ordinary of the mass in Latin and a literal English translation, I was able to follow along. For several years the "Qui tollis peccata mundi" haunted my consciousness; in college it became an instrument of my conversion. Later on I learned that Bach had adapted a melody from Cantata 46 ("Schauet doch und sehet" / "Behold and see") to serve the Latin text common to Lutheran and Catholic worship. It was an inspired act of translation, wedding a universal language of Christian worship to a musical vernacular.

The second time I heard the mass I was stretched out on the same carpet listening to my parents' 1963 Philips monaural recording of *Missa Luba*, an exuberant setting of the mass sung by a Congolese (Luba) boys' choir. A Belgian Franciscan had found a way to unite the call-and-response improvisational singing of the Luba people with the universality of the Latin words. Once again, I could follow along thanks to a faithful English translation. Those liner notes became my missal and catechism.

Much has changed since then—in the year *Missa Luba* was published, the Roman Catholic bishops at the Second Vatican Council approved the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, calling for a revision of the liturgical books in the light of biblical and apostolic sources, with the aim of deepening awareness of the Eucharist as the central mystery of Christian life. With regard to music, "pride of place" was reserved for Latin Gregorian chant, with generous scope for polyphony. The document also sanctioned vernacular translation of the Roman missal, on the understanding that the Latin original would provide the norm, the measure and the ballast for the translators' art.

The third time I heard the mass it was in Spanish, in a small Mexican church. It was and is a vernacular liturgy wonderfully transparent to the Latin original. So too, I have discovered, are the French, the German, the Polish and the Maltese. Among a vast company of successful vernacular liturgies, the English-language mass stands out for its divergence, in the name of "dynamic equivalence," from the Latin original. Thankfully, a fresh and improved translation of the third revised edition of the Roman missal, already in use in Australia, New Zealand and southern Africa, will gradually be placed in service in the

U.S., Ireland and the U.K. beginning in September, to be fully deployed by the first Sunday of Advent.

If reception of this new translation is as generous as it should be, the period of adjustment will be a chance to rediscover the shape of the liturgy and the essentials of Christian belief and hope. The biblical concreteness of the liturgy and its humbling, exultant, awe-inspiring notes, muted in the old translation, are about to be restored. Thus, for example, when the celebrant echoes the angelic and Pauline greeting, "The Lord be with you," the congregation responds, "and with your spirit," a more vivid and theologically interesting translation of *et cum spiritu tuo* than the functional "and also with you." In the Gloria, "We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory," replaces the tepid abridgment to "we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory," so that the summons to adoration may come across as clearly as in the biblically based original. Threefold petitions and rhythmic repetitions, once stripped from the English in the interest of simplicity, evoke a sense of mystery that surpasses prosaic speech.

The Credo duly begins "I believe," spoken in unison to convey at once the individual and corporate character of faith. In the account of creation, "all things visible and invisible" maps the material and spiritual cosmos more adequately than "all that is seen and unseen." Speaking of Christ as "consubstantial with the Father" and "incarnate of the Virgin Mary" plumbs the divine-human nature more deeply than the abstract "one in Being with the Father" and "born of the Virgin Mary." In "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts" the angels return, having been exiled for no fault of their own from the English Sanctus. Just before communion, the centurion's voice rings out again: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof"—living words that transport the worshiper into the gospel environment. Best of all, we get to reclaim the beautiful and dignified word *soul* from the dustbin to which a passing fad in theological anthropology had consigned it; "only say the word and my soul shall be healed" universalizes the centurion's petition and intensifies the communicant's prayer.

Change can be unsettling, but in this case the change is right and just. The postconciliar Catholic mass has found its English voice. The best response I can imagine is a Hebrew word that survives intact in all tongues, the final word of the New Testament—*Amen*.

Carol Zaleski is professor of world religions at Smith College.

IN Review

Open to transformation

by Sarah Morice Brubaker

Kristine A. Culp has produced a sophisticated, original and timely work of constructive theology. It also happens to be a great story—even a page-turner. As with most great stories, its action revolves around an ambiguous and compelling protagonist. Here, though, the protagonist is not an important person but an anthropological entity: vulnerability. Human vulnerability, Culp argues, renders us open to infiltration by all the threats and harms that attend human life—contagion, weakness, error, torture, persecution, sickness, suffering and death—but it also lends humanity the capacity for transformation and hence for bearing God's glory.

Culp's disinclination to harden vulnerability into something more recognizably negative (weakness, for example, or suffering) is foremost among the book's many strengths, for it allows Culp to tell the story of how theologians have sought to offset ambiguous vulnerability with something more reliable and solid. Often, she suggests, this theological impulse has resulted in a bifurcated ecclesiology, with the church existing in two versions: a changeable church vulnerable to persecution, error, scandal and history and a reliable, steadfast church immunized against such forces. Naturally this dynamic unfolds differently depending on whether one is talking about Paul, the Donatists, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Brunner or Ruether, to name but a few of the figures Culp treats with nuance and clarity. It also plays out differently depending on whether the threat is torture, schism, heresy, corruption or institutional malaise. Culp's analysis sounds in both these registers, never becoming muffled by jargon or redundancy.

This historical survey—which constitutes part one of the book—is almost worth the cover price. (My chief complaint after finishing *Vulnerability and Glory* was that I did not discover it in time to assign it to students, as part one is as good as any Protestant survey of ecclesiology I've seen.) But Culp has a more ambitious and constructive goal that is fully unfolded in parts two and three. There she constructs a theology of life before God in which human vulnerability is opened to transformation by God and thereby shows forth God's glory.

It is in vulnerability—not in the flight therefrom—that God's glory is borne by persons and communities; which is to say, only in vulnerability is life before God possible. This is how life before God shows its itinerant, everyday character. Human vulnerability, after all, attaches to the ordinary business of eating and loving and growing old, forming and re-forming communities, trying to stay safe, yearning for the things one needs and (when they are found) expressing delight and gratitude. God's glory, Culp suggests, is shown in precisely these same dimensions and specifically in transformation.

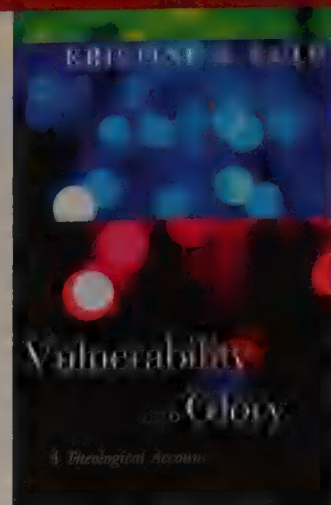
The most sequential minds might find themselves temporarily disoriented by a slight shift in strategy here. Whereas part one is a straightforward historical account, parts two and three are analytical. Culp gently places examples of vulnerability—including those that veer into the most profound suffering, such as torture and rape—alongside theological reflection, biblical study and insights from social science. If one expects these evocations to yield a theological summation on the meaning of vulnerability, one will find that. Culp is, after all, making a

case that Christians should resist the theological impulse to withdraw from vulnerability.

But if I have read her work correctly, she includes the more evocative elements of the book not simply to support her logical argument, as though examples of suffering are somehow redeemed if she can show them to have an unassailable theological payoff. Indeed, I gather that this is precisely what we are meant to question. Culp wisely stops short of valorizing suffering, for this would be exactly the kind of flight from vulnerability that she cautions against. Instead, drawing on the work of Elaine Scarry and others, Culp draws attention to instances of vulnerability that come to a tragic end in order to give words to and theologically remember such suffering.

It would be interesting to read *Vulnerability and Glory* alongside Sarah Coakley's *Powers and Submissions*, Marva Dawn's *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God* or Margaret R. Miles's *Desire and Delight*—or, for that matter, the works of Simone Weil, Elie Wiesel or Johann Baptist Metz. It would have been worthwhile for Culp to include Metz and the Anabaptists of the Radical Reformation as interlocutors. But that is only a quibble. Culp's book is a fresh contribution to constructive theology, written in a style as nuanced as it is engaging.

Sarah Morice Brubaker teaches theology at Phillips Theological Seminary, Tulsa, Oklahoma.



Vulnerability and Glory: A Theological Account

By Kristine A. Culp

Westminster John Knox Press, 248 pp.,

\$30.00 paperback

The Chosen Peoples: America, Israel, and the Ordeals of Divine Election

By Todd Gitlin and Liel Leibovitz
Simon & Schuster, 272 pp., \$26.00

Todd Gitlin of Columbia University and Liel Leibovitz of New York University have written a thoughtful critical volume on the roots and costs of chosenness as it pertains to historical and contemporary Israel and the United States. Their approach is nonpolemical, but their tone implies an important critique of the ideology of chosenness, a summons to do better (that is, repent) and a recognition that supposed chosenness is as much an ordeal as it is a gift. The authors are fully aware of the prerational force of entitlement and privilege that is exercised in the ideology of chosenness.

As a former noncommissioned officer in the Israel Defense Forces, Leibovitz comes at the question of Israel's chosenness from the inside. Gitlin's social location is not indicated, but perhaps his work also reflects a Jewish sensibility. In any case, the authors trace the trajectory of Israel's chosenness from the claims of the Bible to contemporary practice.

The authors recognize that chosenness from the beginning, with Abraham, is an odd claim that "invites incomprehension, skepticism, and obstreperousness" on the part of the chosen, even founding father Abraham himself. In the face of rational wonderment about being chosen, they allow that faith "renders questions of the literal truth of the scriptural stories unnecessary, even petty." But when it comes to the immensity of God and God's intent, faith will not "be obstructed by observed facts."

The defining connection made in the tradition is that the chosen people are linked to chosen land. It is this connection of people and land that produced the messianic impulse of Judaism that is obscured and decentered by traditional rabbinic Judaism. This connection runs from the Bible to the Hasidim, who struggled to recover and restore Judaism. Given the severe pressure for assimilation in Enlightenment Europe, Zionism "erupted from Europe's soil," a reaction

that embraced all the components that constituted Jewishness: chosenness, promise and land. It was singularly Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook who delivered the impulses of Zionism in the 20th century with his insistence that God and Israel are "eternally unconditionally bound." His work was taken up by his son Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, who died in 1982.

It is well known that the roots of Zionism that led to the state of Israel were largely secular. But the messianic brand of chosenness is what has shaped Israeli politics and has produced the zeal for current political determination and defiance. Its result is that "settler certitude outfoxes and outlasts secular uncertainty." The outcome is a "utopian design" held and fostered by the settlers, who believe that any compromise on the land is a compromise of what is most precious and defining.

For all the secular claims of David Ben-Gurion and his trajectory of political leadership, it is messianic Zionism, with its uncompromising position on the chosenness of people and land, that dominates politics and provides the standing ground for the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Many secular politicians have opposed and will continue to oppose such an impulse, but they cannot withstand or defy its force. Gitlin and Leibovitz speak of the "ordeal," the "burden" and the "affliction" of chosenness, but the current "territorial mania" has no patience with such an awareness.

Turning to U.S. chosenness, the authors find a note of theological exceptionalism in the words of some of the first Europeans to come to the America—John Winthrop, John Cotton and the Puritans, who trafficked in evangelical rhetoric that would fuel revolutionary fervor. What strikes one most about this analysis is the way in which U.S. chosenness, like Israel's, is linked to the land. Jefferson, Jackson and Polk, the great expansionists, all appealed to chosenness as a basis for national imagination. Even Jefferson, in his cool deism, found such rhetoric useful for mobilizing energy for his expansionist impulse.

The authors suggest a straight line of

Reviewed by Walter Brueggemann, whose most recent book is An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible (Fortress).

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influence from the Puritans to the aggressiveness of Theodore Roosevelt, the missionary zeal of Woodrow Wilson and eventually the eager reach of George W. Bush, all of which attached American greatness to a grasp for more land under the guise of advancing democracy. This propensity has had from the outset a conscious component of Manifest Destiny, and it has culminated in a U.S. imperialism that is shaped by racism, in which the white race is destined to govern for and on behalf of the less competent of other races. This material is not unlike that presented by Bruce Feiler in *America's Prophet: Moses and the American Story*, only here the aggressiveness is more accented and the authors imply a critique of uncritical chosenness.

This nearly Manichaean sense of chosenness has been interrupted in U.S. history only rarely, by such voices as William Jennings Bryan, William James and Mark Twain. It was especially called into question by the ironic sense of Abraham Lincoln, here singled out for his phrase "almost chosen people." Lincoln would

not give in to the ideology of chosenness. As the authors draw a line from Teddy Roosevelt to George W. Bush, they dare to entertain also the possibility of a line that runs from Lincoln to Barack Obama, a line that is promised but surely not very visible or reliable. In sum, the messianic claim to the land is as deeply embedded in the ideology of the United States as it is in the passion of Israel.

Finally, in a nearly meditative tone, the authors ponder the unchosen and consider the deep tension between "the West" (with the U.S. as a stand-in) and Muslims. They present the Israeli-Palestinian contestation over the land as a contest between humiliation and vengeance, with the humiliators never understanding that they evoke the vengeance.

The conflict between the chosen and the unchosen is, of course, ongoing:

The drama of a single chosen people colliding with pretenders and unsalvageables haunts the story of bloody encounters from the Crusades to the Arab Revolt of 1936–39, from Little Big Horn to the Yom Kippur War, from Wounded Knee to Hebron. . . . The chosen and the unchosen are entangled together by resentment and resignation, mercy and anger, humor and heartbreak, cacophony and harmony. The relationship between the chosen people and those whom they dispossess . . . is partly an extended war dance, but it is also a sequence of movements, sometimes slow, sometimes stormy, in which the vanquished, while never triumphant, nonetheless help determine the rhythm of history.

The authors consider the views of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said to be voices of the unchosen. They indicate the ways in which chosenness moves against the unchosen and begets a counter-chosenness, so that there is an endless contest of chosennesses that is a toxic game without exit, that falls into a mad mode of Manichaeanism.


This descriptive analysis results in no stunning insights, but does yield a hope and an urging that the chosen might act differently with and toward the unchosen. Gitlin and Leibovitz briefly point to the Palestinian poetry of Mahmoud

Darwish, who imagines a renunciation of a divine scripted calling, a suggestion that is paralleled by the hope of the Jewish writer Mark Braverman. But the tone of the book by its end is a sad realism that "the cycles of race hatred, revenge, and war cannot be rescinded, erased from memory. History is unsparing." That is as far as the book goes. It is an honest rendition of where we are.

A third element of the enigma of chosenness lies beyond the horizon of these authors but surely belongs in our consideration, for one cannot get from the chosenness of Israel to the chosenness of the United States except by way of the chosenness of the church. It is certain that the church regards itself as the most recently chosen people of God—chosen for mission, but chosen nonetheless. And that chosenness has produced claims of "no salvation outside the church," with all the power and leverage that such a claim has historically carried.

Thus as we reconsider chosenness, I suggest that the church cannot get a pass on the problem. And if the church cannot, then there may be reconsiderations about the claim for the chosenness of Jesus as the sole Messiah—a claim that is deep within our Christian confession, which I gladly confess, but one that is exceedingly difficult for many faithful people in a world of good-faith neighbors. We do not know our way forward on such profound challenges, even as we do not know how the chosenness of Israel or the United States can be revisioned in a world that cries out for justice and peace.


At the very edge of the Hebrew Bible is this astonishing oracle of promise in Isaiah: "On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, . . . whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage'" (Isa. 19:24–25). The oracle dares to list God's pet names for chosen Israel and then freely distribute them across the landscape, even to Israel's enemies. The message of such poetic imagination is that God has many chosen peoples. It is to be "on that day." We may now wonder, when these several chosennesses have reached their lethal limit, how soon that day may be. It is a day that requires relinquishments of a daring, obedient kind.



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Travels in Siberia

By Ian Frazier

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 544 pp., \$30.00

How would a terrific writer approach a subject that is so vast that a thousand books about it would still only cover a bit of it? One answer: wander into and through and around it, armed only with ravenous curiosity, take maniacal notes, listen for stories, read most everything ever published about it, stay with the project for 15 years, cheerfully abandon any pretense of writing anything authoritative, and eventually, if you are the fine American writer Ian Frazier and your subject is Russia's endless east, produce a book like *Travels in Siberia*, which is peculiar, fascinating and more proof that Frazier is sui generis. I cannot imagine any other writer who could or would commit to a 500-page tome that is both informal and magisterial (the reader absorbs a startling amount of Russian history) on a subject about which CENTURY readers probably know the same thimbleful that I do.

"Officially, there is no such place as Siberia," Frazier begins, and away we go into a place so mysterious and amorphous that it doesn't even have agreed-upon boundaries or a clear etymology for its name, which may mean "the sleeping land" or "the marshy wilderness" or "take it for yourself" (from the Russian *se'beri*). It is huge—a 12th of the land on Earth. It holds the biggest forest in the world. The only colder place on Earth is Antarctica. Most of the mosquitoes on Earth might live there. Millions of men and women and children were imprisoned and tortured and murdered there. Genghis Khan and the dreaded Mongol hordes came from there. Stalin was exiled there many times before he seized power and murdered millions of people and exiled countless numbers there himself. The biggest carved head of Lenin is there, a 42-ton glaring behemoth in Ulan-Ude.

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, perhaps

the greatest of all short-story writers, exiled himself there for a while, seriously damaging his health. Whole villages were exiled to Siberia. Fyodor Dostoevsky was exiled there and had half his head shaved weekly, like all political prisoners. A Frenchwoman in St. Petersburg was exiled to Siberia for being more beautiful than Empress Elizabeth. The anarchist Mikhail Bakunin was exiled to Siberia but escaped east all the way to the Pacific, caught ships to San Francisco, Panama and New York and ended up in London. The Soviets exiled people for stealing thread, smiling during political lectures or dancing the foxtrot. The U.S. Army, startlingly, was in Siberia in 1918, ostensibly protecting American interests (such as they were, in Vladivostok) against the Bolsheviks. Yul Brynner and Rudolf Nureyev were born there.

And 21st-century Siberia? Mountains of trash along the road—mostly plastic bottles and metal fuel barrels but hardly ever any paper, observes Frazier; vast flocks of crows and ravens; countless pigs and geese in villages; lots of loud and vulgar talk-radio stations, just like in America; a popular beer named for Admiral Kolchak, the White Army leader who tried to overthrow the Bolsheviks; a beach in Vladivostok, on the Pacific, where a sign proclaims MUSOR NE BROSAT, Do Not Throw Trash, and the beach is "composed entirely of broken glass, mostly bottle glass, mostly sea-worn bottle green"; endless silent abandoned *lagers*, prison camps, deep in the lonely wilderness; immense vistas of steppe and boreal forest inhabited by the legendary sable

(cousin to the otter and badger) and a handful of enormous Amur tigers in the far east; oil wells and oil fields and gas wells flowing so profligately since Vladimir Putin came to power that Russia now produces more oil than any other country—and the man who once ran its biggest energy company, Gazprom, is now Russia's president, Alexander Medvedev.

Frazier made five long journeys into and around Siberia for *Travels*, and much of the book consists of the sort of relaxed conversational notes from the road that enlivened his classic *Great Plains*. Perhaps the travelogue stretches and wanders a bit, but Frazier has such a sharp eye and ear for detail that you cannot skip a page—no mean compliment for a book of 500 pages. And he has the lovely virtue of not thinking himself heroic or dashing, which makes him an agreeable companion over so many miles and paragraphs. By the end, along with sighing happily that I had finally finished a book as big as Siberia, I found myself amazed that I had known so little and had discovered so much in the company of a very deft writer indeed. Is this his best book? No—*Great Plains* is terrific, and readers new to his essays should read the hilarious *Lamentations of the Father* and the love letters to the Big Apple that make up his *Gone to New York*. But it's a very good book, and almost certainly the best book about Siberia you'll ever read.

The phrase "incomplete grandiosity of Russia" describes the country, Frazier concludes. "Russia's grandiosity, good or bad, doesn't end. It just trails off into the

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Reviewed by Brian Doyle, editor of Portland Magazine at the University of Portland and the author, most recently, of a "sprawling Oregon novel" called Mink River.

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The present of a present presence -
Scott A. Grady essay review

"One of the shortcomings with moving forward is that there are people that require constant push-and-pull with technology."

I was recently talking with a friend who is a software veteran. He said:

"I've described it like this: 'When you make something, get it out as fast as you can because the more time you spend working on things, the longer they stay in the world.' No games, all right." I agree with it, too, without any.

3

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country's expanses. . . . What I'd seen of Siberia was only a tiny part. The grandiosity extended constantly onward, out of the view." He never saw one of the biggest dams in the world, on the Angara River. He never explored the vast melting ice sheets and rising swamps that are the price for global warming, or saw immense reindeer herds, or talked at length with scientists who worry about Siberia's rocketing rate of methane emis-

sion, or met the Siberian Messiah called Vissarion, who used to be a traffic cop. But one of our finest writers did go there, became absorbed by a huge piece of God's profligate gift and returned with riveting stories for us. There is a gentle humor and mercy and attentiveness in Frazier's work, and I think deep down he is a spiritual writer. Witness is the great work; and here is a fine witness on the job.

BookMarks

One Day I Will Write About This Place:

A Memoir

By Binyavanga Wainaina
Graywolf Press, 272 pp., \$24.00

In 2005, Wainaina published the now infamous essay "How to Write About Africa," skewering descriptions of the continent's big red sky, hagiography of wild animals, and fixation on describing starving or dead bodies. Now he has written his own account of growing up in postimperial Kenya, a memoir in vivid scenes of childhood soccer games, primary school, his failed attempt at a college degree, and relationships with his stoic father and fervently religious mother. His story is about family dynamics and the daily life of the Kenyan middle class in a shifting political landscape, but it is also a portrait of a developing artist. Throughout his early life, Wainaina continuously turned to reading for comfort and adventure. His love of the written word is ultimately his key to finding a place in the raw, bustling world he describes.

In the Valley of the Shadow: On the Foundations of Religious Belief

By James L. Kugel
Free Press, 256 pp., \$26.00

Bible scholar Kugel notes that "starkness" is a basic feature of the Bible. Many psalms, for example, describe a world "stripped down to the essentials, right and wrong, good and evil, following God or going astray." A world of such polarities may seem far removed from everyday life, Kugel says, until we face a moment of crisis and the words of scripture are suddenly heard in a fresh way. That is what happened to Kugel himself after he was diagnosed with an advanced stage of cancer. *In the Valley of the Shadow* is his account of how the texts and themes of scripture that he has taught at Harvard took on new resonance as he lived under the shadow of his own imminent death. (As it turned out, the cancer was successfully treated.)

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ON Music

Love & Gravity: Songs from LaSalle Street Church (self-released)

Outside of Nashville or Los Angeles, perhaps no house of worship has more recording studio owners per capita than Chicago's LaSalle Street Church. At least three regularly attend there, and the church has become a haven for musicians. This is largely due to the dynamic ministry of Gary Rand, a former touring singer-songwriter and Christian music pioneer who incorporates world music, African-American gospel, rock and jazz into Sunday services.

Rand's latest project, carried out by Gravity Studios owner Doug McBride and Riverbend Studios owner Chris Stacey, is *Love & Gravity*, a 13-song disc that samples LaSalle's best performers. This album is far from being a novelty CD; McBride's résumé includes Live, Buddy Guy and major acts that would take up most of this space to list. As crisp as any commercial release, *Love & Gravity* represents an amazingly uniform album in theme, purpose and style, considering that the tracking took place in a single day, with a single band of LaSalle players backing the lead performers.

Many of the songs create a bracing country-rock vibe, with challenging lyrics and themes to match. Rand himself opens the disc with a song he co-wrote with his wife, Lenora. Titled "It Hurts Here," it's a haunting exploration of empathy that recalls Christian music pioneer Mark Heard: "Where there are hearts that beat, there are hearts that bleed / Where it stops God only knows,

unless it stops with you and me." Matt Black's song "God Is a Woman" isn't for the theologically faint of heart. Building from a stripped, shivering dirge into an anthemlike rocker, the song declares: "She rescues and frees us / She comes to me like Jesus / She moves in between us / She changes my heart."

Tipping the hat to Wilco, the college-age Stacey Brothers sing of redemption in the throes of loss on "Sticks and Stones," backed by dusty harmonica and musicians in waltz-time swing: "You've got to wait 'til the sticks and stones sing." Yet it's younger sister Alaina Stacey who steals the show with the moving "Someplace to Go" (written by her dad, Chris). The 16-year-old sounds like the long-lost little sister of Emmylou Harris. Her high lonesome "woos," backed by a softly scrubbed acoustic guitar and spare percussion, convey a whirlwind full of autumn shivers: "When we cry 'Help me, Jesus,' please God don't leave us, there's always someplace to go."

That's not to take anything from the other performers. Their work here calls for a baker's dozen of solo releases. This album soars far above a host of calculated, slaved-over releases from the Christian music world.

Love & Gravity is available at myspace.com/lasallestreetmusic and at iTunes and CD Baby (www.cdbaby.com/cd/lasallest).



Take the High Road by Blind Boys of Alabama (Saguaro Road Records)

With roots stretching back seven decades, the Blind Boys of Alabama still chug along, aided here by a host of country luminaries, including Vince Gill ("Can You Give Me a Drink?") and the Oak Ridge Boys ("Take the High Road," which pairs majestic vocals with laid-back twang). It's hard to imagine a more delicious mix than the lean Dobro slide guitar and Sunday morning call-and-response vocals that fuel the remake of Muddy Waters's "Why Don't You Live So God Can Use You."

Best of Vegas by Frank Sinatra (Concord Records)

As the epitome of vocal cool and confidence, Frank Sinatra ruled the Las Vegas strip for more than two decades. This compilation draws on four of his best performances there between 1961 and 1987. In a 1966 recording, Old Blue Eyes is at his Rat Pack best on "I've Got You Under My Skin," with growling backup from Count Basie and his orchestra. But he was no less spunky in '82, singing "New York, New York" with humorous asides to Chicago and

Reviewed by Louis R. Carlozo, a music producer in Chicago.

Kansas City before taking the tune home on a high note.

Gustafer Yellowgold's Infinity Sock

by Morgan Taylor

[Apple Eye Productions, DVD and CD]

When he's not backing up Wilco members on their solo projects, singer-songwriter Morgan Taylor makes sparkling kids' music, drawing comparisons to adult artists from Bread to the Beatles. Taylor sings about characters like a frisky eel that dresses in a wardrobe of single socks ("Slim Gets in 'Em"). The tender pop ballad "Beehive," with timpani accents and vocal swells, suggests an outtake from the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*.

Becoming Liturgy

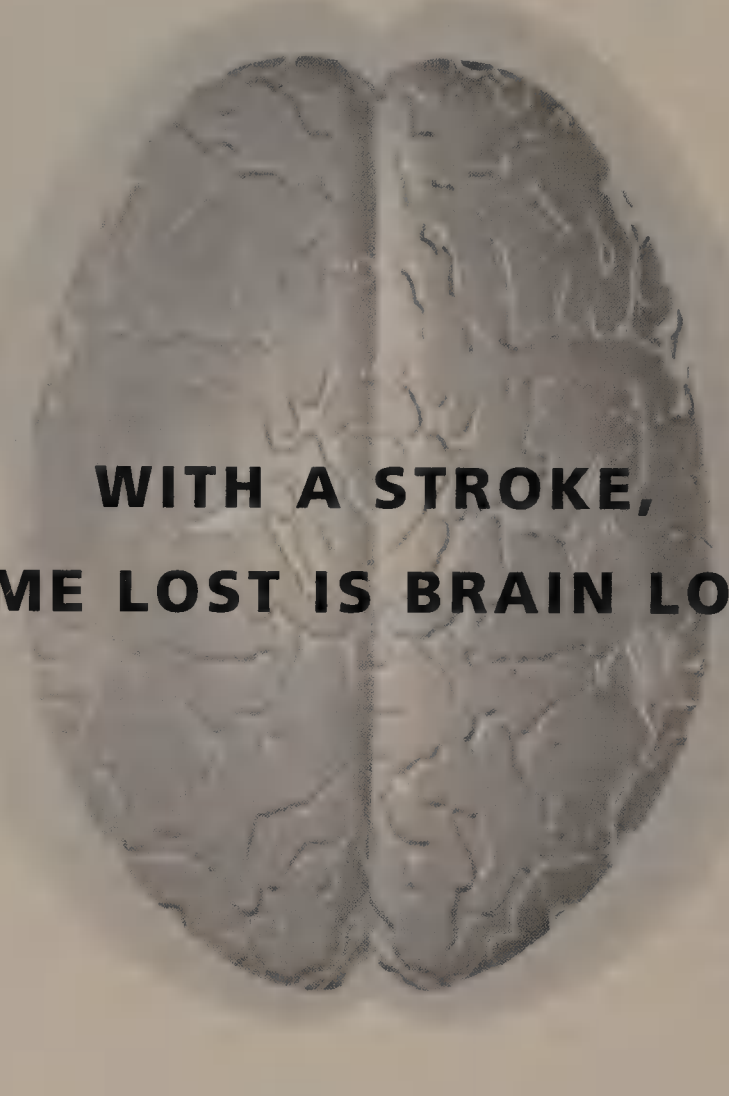
by Nate Houge [self-released]

Part of the Minneapolis posse of Lutheran musicians that includes Jonathan Rundman and Echelon, Nate Houge offers up a heartfelt CD that creates a gentle mood for worship and the time leading to it. The 28 songs run the gamut from "Faith Renew" (anchored by the simple, sweet playing of violinist Mari Carlson) to the bongo-driven "God Over Everything," which begins with the familiar "holy, holy, holy" refrain. Highly recommended for use with kids and youth groups, though there's nothing childish about this fine disc (natehouge.com).

Boom Boom Rock 'n' Roll: The Best of Freddy Cannon

[Shout Factory]

With the recent resurgence in the Four Seasons' popularity thanks to *Jersey Boys*, it's an apt time to rediscover Cannon (born Frederick Picariello), another East Coast Italian-American who worked with Four Seasons producer Bob Crewe. The 24 songs here recall the pre-Beatles era, and the amazingly propulsive "Tallahassee Lassie" sounds as rough and tumble as anything you'll hear by Jerry Lee Lewis or Chuck Berry. Other swingin' hits here include "Palisades Park," penned by former *Gong Show* host Chuck Barris.



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Meek's Cutoff

Directed by Kelly Reichardt
Starring Michelle Williams and
Bruce Greenwood



JOURNEY OF SURVIVAL: Michelle Williams stars in an unromanticized western about three pioneer families traveling the Oregon Trail.

It's 1845, and three couples in rickety covered wagons are headed west on the Oregon Trail. To lead them they have hired Stephen Meek (Bruce Greenwood), a cocky mountain man who has wooed the wide-eyed couples and the one child aboard with tales of his many accomplishments, his knowledge of the Indian tribes and his "let's do this" bravado.

But as *Meek's Cutoff* begins, things are not going well. The pioneers look exhausted and confused, their animals tired and sick. Any doubt about their grim situation is clarified once the boy scratches the single word *lost* on a sun-bleached boulder.

The film is based on a true story chronicled in bits and pieces over the years. It starts out quietly and slows down from there. In a perfect union of tempo and content, director Kelly Reichardt and writer Jonathan Raymond strive to suggest both the journey's difficulty and its tedium; it's filled with daily tasks undertaken as the pioneers' confidence in their chatty leader starts to drain away.

The laconic men, led by the wary Solomon Tetherow (Will Patton), are not quite sure what to make of Meek, whose daily reassurances that they are on the right path are beginning to ring hollow. The women, especially the strong and capable Emily Tetherow (Michelle Williams), are less conflicted. They sense that Meek, like many of the men they have encountered over the years, is a charlatan, a first-class liar who is escorting them to their doom. Clad in tight bonnets that protect their faces from the sun and sand while also stripping away their individual identities, the women gaze at him with a combination

of fear and contempt. They realize that even if Meek is a snake in the grass, he is the only hope they have of exiting the desert alive.

The equation changes, however, when the group captures a Cayuse Indian (Rod Rondeaux) who has been watching them from afar. Though initially terrified of him, Emily is forced to look beyond the gruesome tales of Indian brutality—fueled by the racist Meek—to wonder if this stranger from another world may be the answer to their prayers.

Meek's Cutoff has been labeled everything from a revisionist western to a feminist allegory. Shot by cinematographer Chris Blauvelt in an old-fashioned ratio that's more square than rectangle, it rejects the familiar big-screen conceit of a romanticized West. Instead, it questions the various roles and realities that accompanied the pioneers on their journeys.

The quasi-documentary style is mesmerizing in its own way. With the arrival of the native, the film suddenly morphs into a story about faith. Meek, like a father leading his children, has proved unfit for the arduous task at hand. But at least he is familiar and communicative and, most important, white. Just how desperate and alone must we be, the film seems to be asking, before we stop rejecting those who are alien to our culture and religion—and start examining how their own trials might have led them to this same crossroads?

Potiche

Directed by François Ozon
Starring Catherine Deneuve and
Gérard Depardieu

While it is always a joy to find a movie that works on all levels, we sometimes must content ourselves with individual aspects that succeed. A perfect example is the French film *Potiche*, a candy-coated comedy set in the 1970s which employs the broad style of that decade's sitcom television to spin a tale about a trophy wife forced to abandon her pots and pans to take over her husband's factory when he falls ill during a labor strike. Of course, she succeeds where her husband has failed, using common sense, fairness and a touch of panache to erase years of class struggle.

What saves this trifle from the cinematic sale bin, however, is the casting of the still-glamorous Catherine Deneuve as the frustrated woman and the suddenly very large Gérard Depardieu as her ex-lover who is now a political foe. Their scenes together conjure up Tracy and Hepburn as they argue and seduce, tease and cajole, and ultimately learn how to deal with their memories and regrets for the sake of a new generation. It would be nice if these two legends of French cinema could find a more substantial vehicle to show off their comedy team talents, but until then, think of *Potiche* as a tasty appetizer.

Reviewed by John Petrakis, who teaches screenwriting in Chicago.

by Philip Jenkins

n o t e s f r o m t h e GLOBAL CHURCH

Mideast Christian fear

A century ago, a wide-ranging *Catholic Encyclopedia* tried to give believers an alternative to secular reference works like the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Now available online, the Catholic work offers wonderful browsing for anyone interested in Christian history or theology. But reading some of the entries on the Middle East is heartbreaking.

As recently as the start of the last century, Middle East cities celebrated since patristic times could be listed as thriving Christian centers. Denominational loyalties and hierarchies—that of the Greek Orthodox and the Melkites, the Assyrians, Jacobites and Armenians, the Catholics and even the Protestant missionaries—were lovingly described in the *Encyclopedia*. Such accounts make for poignant reading now, when we know that many of these Christian communities were slaughtered or uprooted in the extraordinary violence of the decade after 1915. A million Armenians and Assyrians perished, and millions more Greeks were expelled from what became the nation of Turkey.

The religious cleansing did not sweep the whole region. Christians survived in strength in Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Iraq. But the other communities could never forget the years of massacre, which profoundly shaped their later actions. In fact, we cannot understand the modern history of the Middle East without acknowledging those distinc-

tively Christian politics. When we look at the recent upsurges in Syria, Egypt and elsewhere, we repeatedly hear the distant echoes of the bloody events that occurred during and immediately after the First World War.

That war transformed the Middle East, creating a new structure of states and igniting new forces of Arab nationalism and Muslim reform. As Christians were among the better educated and more prosperous groups, they naturally played a major political role. But they had to strike a delicate balance. They were understandably nervous about the rise of Islamic movements, all the more so when Muslim birth rates were so much higher than their own. As the Christian minority shrank in size and influence, it faced an increasing likelihood of persecution by a Muslim majority—and conceivably something like a repetition of 1915. The question was: How could Christians help create a strong and independent Arab world without awakening the Islamic giant?

Christians responded by espousing movements that could gain mass popular appeal, while remaining strictly secular and religiously neutral. This was in no sense a cynical strategy; it simply made sense for Christians to lead their societies in secular directions. Christians were among the founders and most

visible militants of the region's once-thriving leftist, socialist and communist groups.

Others became enthusiastic patriots for secular nationalist causes, including pan-Arabism. The pioneering theorist of modern Arab nationalism was the Damascus-born Orthodox Christian Constantin Zureiq. Another Christian son of Damascus, Michel Aflaq, was cofounder of the Ba'ath ("Renaissance") Party that played a pivotal role in the modern history of both Iraq and Syria. Coptic Christians, meanwhile, were enthusiastic supporters of Egypt's nationalist and secular Wafd Party.

By the 1950s, such Christian-founded movements were offering idealistic followers a heady mixture of socialism, secularism and nationalism that was all the more tempting as Arab thinkers struggled to come to terms with humiliating defeats at the hands of Israel. Palestinian Christians like George Habash and Nayef Hawatmeh emerged as the most stubborn and resourceful foes of the Zionist state and the most effective guerrilla commanders.

Although nationalist and Ba'athist movements appealed to Muslims as well as Christians, they were most popular with minority groups that stood to lose everything from an assertion of power by mainstream Sunni Islam.

These movements appealed to Christians, but also to controversial Muslim groups like Syria's Alawites. Syrian and Iraqi Ba'ath regimes suppressed Islamist movements with a brutality that is difficult to understand except as the response of minorities who desperately feared for their own fates should they ever lose their grip on state power. Even Saddam Hussein's Sunni clique took its secularism very seriously.

Since the late 1980s, secular regimes and movements in the Middle East have suffered repeated blows, and this trend has been cumulatively disastrous for Christian populations. Rapid demographic change combined with a global Islamist revival to fuel the success of potent movements such as Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, which eclipsed secularism. Meanwhile, Saddam's lunatic invasion of Kuwait in 1990 set the stage for the destruction of his regime and the expulsion or exile of most Iraqi Christians. It remains to be seen whether Syria's minorities will suffer a comparable fate in the coming years.

The main mystery in this story is why Western Christians seem neither to know nor care about the catastrophe that has unfolded before them in the ancient heartlands of their faith.

Philip Jenkins's Notes from the Global Church appears in every other issue.

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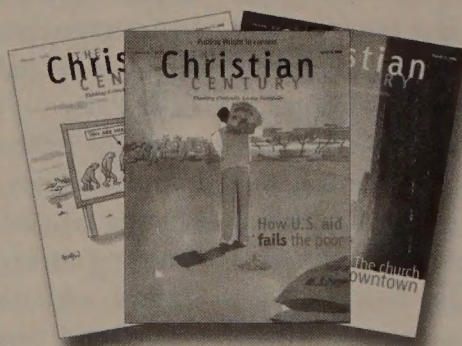
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Rich Catch, by Eginio Weinert

German painter and sculptor Eginio Weinert (b. 1920) began his artistic training after entering the monastery of the Benedictine Missionaries. He left the order before taking final vows. In 1941 he was imprisoned after refusing to utter “Heil Hitler.” Several years later he lost his right hand in an accident. He taught himself to work with his opposite hand and began his art career anew. Whether working in cloisonné-style enamel paint with bronze thread details (see above left) or in bronze sculpture (see upper right), Weinert offers luminous images of figures in church history and the Bible.

—Lil Copan



A dialogue on the Christian future



Barbara Wheeler

Barbara Wheeler is director of Auburn Theological Seminary's Center for the Study of Theological Education, a research institute that enables theological schools to understand their work on the basis of hard data and research.



Richard J. Mouw

Richard J. Mouw is president of Fuller Theological Seminary and the author of *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World* (InterVarsity Press).

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